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**Beyond the Bilateral: Retrospective Analysis of
the Issue of British and French Nuclear Arsenals
Offset in US-Russian Strategic Stability Dialogue**

Report

PIR Center Reports Series

№ 46

**Moscow
2025**

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This report examines the evolution of the debate over the inclusion of British and French nuclear arsenals in U.S.-Soviet/Russian arms control negotiations from the Cold War to the present. It identifies several key phases in which the issue resurfaced – from SALT I and SALT II, through the INF and START processes, to post-Cold War discussions following the ratification of the New START Treaty. In each case, “hinge points” emerged where Soviet (and later Russian) demands for inclusion intersected with the strategic, political, and technological choices of London and Paris.

Employing historical analysis and comparative case studies, the research highlights how both France and the UK consistently defended the independence of their nuclear deterrents, resisted constraints that could tie them to U.S. strategic planning, and prioritized bilateral cooperation with Washington over integration into superpower arms control frameworks. Conversely, Moscow often leveraged the issue of European nuclear forces as a bargaining tool rather than a realistic negotiating objective.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive treatment of an underexplored dimension of arms control history: the interaction between European nuclear powers and the U.S.-Soviet / Russian bilateral framework. The findings demonstrate that while European arsenals were too limited to alter the strategic balance directly, their political significance shaped both transatlantic cooperation and Soviet negotiating tactics. In today’s context – marked by the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, NATO-Russia confrontation, and renewed interest in European security architecture – the positions of London and Paris remain cautious. They favor risk reduction and conventional arms control over participation in formal multilateral nuclear agreements, though long-term shifts could open new space for engagement.

This report is based on a master’s thesis defended by the author at MGIMO University in June, 2025.

This report was completed on October 27, 2025.

PIR Center Reports Series. № 46

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ISBN 978-5-6051623-6-0



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Highlights

- Soviet attempts to limit UK and French nuclear forces failed due to technological gaps, political resistance, and the unwillingness of both countries to constrain their developing arsenals. At the same time, the US and USSR maintained much larger stockpiles;
- Soviet calls to end US-European nuclear cooperation were politically unacceptable to Paris and London for several reasons. First, until the 1990s, the arsenals of both countries lagged significantly in deployment, missile characteristics, and nuclear arsenal diversity, making the limitations at that stage incompatible with developing a reliable second-strike capability. Second, London and Paris were reluctant to join talks negotiating standard ceilings with the US, as this could have made them more dependent on US targeting and war plans. Third, one Soviet demand was to halt their nuclear cooperation with the US, which was critical for their nuclear program development, especially for the UK. Conversely, Soviet-US talks consistently reinforced UK-French nuclear bilateral cooperation;
- The USSR likely used the issue of British and French forces as a means of leverage in negotiations. At the SALT-II talks, it was clear that engaging France and the UK directly was impossible; instead, during the SALT-II and START-I negotiations, the USSR took both countries' arsenals into account when calculating ceilings with the US;
- Today, neither France nor the UK is interested in joining strategic nuclear arms control agreements. At the same time, Russia believes further bilateral reductions without including all three Western nuclear powers would weaken its deterrent. Given these positions, there is little chance for immediate progress on arms control involving the UK and France, as the initiative for their participation mainly comes from Russia;
- At the same time, the Ukraine conflict, evolving nuclear capabilities of all P5 states, and uncertainties about the future of US-NATO engagement under the Republican administration have led to renewed European interest in security architecture, potentially making France and the UK more open to broader European security discussions in the future;
- Paris and London are most interested in risk reduction and, in the long term, conventional arms control, particularly regarding limitations on Russian dual-use systems. Confidence-building measures, including the re-establishment of military-to-military contacts and notification systems, are important but depend on resolving the Ukraine conflict and addressing Russian security concerns. Furthermore, both countries see value in reducing the role of tactical nuclear weapons;

- Broader, long-term strategic nuclear arms control may become possible if France, the UK, and the US cooperate more closely and align their interests in nuclear force patrolling to counter Russia or China. Such developments might increase interest in multilateral engagement;
- The future of arms control in Europe depends on recognizing the security concerns of all parties, having sufficient political will, and considering the impact and scale of technological advancements.

Introduction

The issue of nuclear arms control and nonproliferation remains a central concern in international relations. Historically, both Russian and international scholars have primarily focused on the perspectives of arms control between the United States and Russia, the two dominant nuclear powers. China has increasingly attracted scholarly and policy attention due to the expansion of its nuclear arsenal and its growing role as a strategic competitor. In contrast, the potential for arms control involving France and the United Kingdom remains underexplored, mainly in Western academic literature. Although Russia has repeatedly called for the inclusion of British and French nuclear forces in strategic arms control frameworks, these appeals have often lacked substantive elaboration at the official level.

The Soviet Union first raised the issue of accounting for British and French nuclear forces during the SALT I negotiations. However, limited time and the ongoing buildup of strategic arsenals by both the United States and the USSR hindered substantive discussion. The topic resurfaced with greater urgency during the SALT II negotiations, particularly in the lead-up to the 1974 Vladivostok Summit, where Brezhnev and Ford reached key agreements on strategic limitations. Following this progress, the Soviet delegation reduced its emphasis on including British and French capabilities. Later on, Soviet diplomats continued to advocate for the inclusion of France and the United Kingdom in arms control discussions during the INF and START I negotiations. This position was maintained through much of the 1980s, especially in relation to the INF Treaty, until the 1986 Reykjavik Summit. At that point, Gorbachev chose not to press the issue further after the United States accepted the “zero-zero” proposal.

The issue of French and British arsenals wasn’t discussed during the negotiation of New START. However, in June 2013, President Barack Obama proposed further reductions in the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals¹, suggesting that both countries could reduce their deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third below the limits established by the New START Treaty. However, Russia was not receptive to this proposal. Russian officials expressed skepticism, linking any further nuclear reductions to broader security concerns, including the inclusion of other nuclear-armed states such as the United Kingdom and France in arms control.²

Russia renewed its call for the inclusion of France and Britain in arms control agreements after the New START ceilings were reached in 2018. Moscow argued that French and British

¹ Cohen T. Obama calls for reducing U.S., Russian nukes // CNN, 2013. URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2013/06/19/politics/obama-nuclear-cuts> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

² Obama in Berlin calls for US-Russia nuclear weapons cuts // BBC News, 2013. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22962873> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

nuclear forces should be taken into account in any follow-up agreement. This argument resurfaced when Russia suspended New START in 2023.

Today, France and the UK's nuclear policies have gained renewed significance in light of Russia's increasingly confrontational relations with NATO and the European Union. This paper examines the current state of both countries' relations with Russia and their implications for nuclear strategy. As members of the "nuclear five," France and the UK play pivotal roles in multilateral nonproliferation and disarmament negotiations.

The paradigm of arms control has undergone a notable shift in recent years. Historically, arms control was grounded in a bilateral framework, primarily aimed at preserving strategic stability between the United States and Russia. For decades, Western powers showed limited interest in pursuing multilateral nuclear arms control arrangements. Although the Russian government occasionally advocated for the inclusion of the United Kingdom and France, it rarely articulated a concrete vision for a multilateral framework. Today, in the context of China's expanding nuclear arsenal and emerging proposals for potential trilateral engagement among the United States, Russia, and China, a new opportunity may be emerging for Russia to articulate a more detailed vision for multilateral arms control.

Moreover, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine has heightened the risk of confrontation between Russia and Europe. At the onset of the war, France raised the alert level of its nuclear submarines, while Russia, in response to long-range missiles supplied by France and the UK to Ukraine, lowered its nuclear threshold. The role of tactical nuclear weapons has increased, with renewed discussions in Russia about the feasibility of a limited nuclear war.³ France has also made its nuclear capabilities more visible by opening the Luxeuil airbase to host 40 Rafale jets and the future ASN4G hypersonic missile by 2035, as well as inviting NATO ambassadors to its Rafale base in Istres and publicizing military exercises.

With changing U.S. leadership, European voices advocating for a European deterrent have grown louder. France's proposal to Europeanize its nuclear deterrent, supported by Germany and Baltic states, while the UK has expressed openness to closer nuclear cooperation with Paris. In the absence of any binding arms control agreements in Europe, such developments may contribute to an increased salience of European-range nuclear weapons and strategic dual-use systems both in Russia and Europe.

³ "We will harshly sober people up" interview with Sergey Karaganov // Russia in Global Affairs. November, 2024. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/zhystko-otrezvlyat-karaganov/> (accessed: 04.08.2025) [«Будем жёстко отрезвлять»]; "You're right to fear nuclear war": Academician Alexei Arbatov spoke about the main risks of the Ukrainian conflict // Komsomolskaya Pravda. September, 2024. URL: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27634.5/4984521/> (accessed: 04.08.2025). [«Правильно боитесь ядерной войны»: академик Алексей Арбатов рассказал о главных рисках украинского конфликта].

Analyzing the reasons behind the repeated failure of the Russian demands to engage both countries in arms control would be the main task of this research. Understanding the fundamental contradictions between Russian demands and the positions of France and the UK can help clarify the broader European interests and perspectives on arms control, particularly in light of the war in Ukraine.

The goal of this report is to conduct a retrospective analysis of the discussion concerning the potential inclusion of France's and the UK's nuclear weapons in arms control talks from Soviet, U.S., and French-British perspectives. The study aims to answer why the inclusion of French and British forces has not been possible to this day and whether the Ukrainian crisis has introduced shifts that could make such a dialogue feasible.

The Concept of Independence of British and French Nuclear Forces: from the Beginning of the Cold War until SALT-1

The independence of British and French nuclear arsenals didn't come per se and resulted from the long and thorough debates both within the countries' political and military structures, as well as within NATO. Thus, independence was considered a significant historical and political achievement by both countries.

Since the beginning, British and then French nuclear programs were closely aligned in their motivations and stages of development, but differed in their goals. For both, building a nuclear arsenal was about asserting a greater political significance and autonomy in the bipolar world run by the US and the Soviet Union. Besides, the decisions to build independent nuclear programs were motivated, on the one hand, by peer-to-peer competition, and on the other, by the opportunities for closer military cooperation and exchange.

Both Paris and London also wanted to play leadership roles in European defense, although the British tried to do it through NATO, while the French wanted to do it by making their nuclear deterrent the foundation for a European nuclear deterrent. They both developed different ideas of a Western deterrent, which would provide them with more authority to protect European interests and weaken the US monopoly on defense. This idea was a reaction to the NATO plans to develop Multilateral Nuclear Forces, which would be under direct control of Washington and which were practically meant to prevent France and Germany from acquiring nuclear weapons.

France and the United Kingdom were prepared to delegate the defense of Germany, viewed as the most probable starting point of a potential Soviet invasion, to the United States. They regarded tactical nuclear weapons as sufficient for this purpose. However, when it came to their own strategic nuclear forces, both countries were reluctant to grant Washington any decision-making authority. Moreover, each of them tried to push forward their own plan for Western nuclear forces, which would assign them a more important role than that of other allies. The UK proposed the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF) in 1964.⁴ The plan envisioned a nuclear force comprising British V-bombers and Polaris submarines, balanced by an equivalent American contribution, all of which were committed to NATO. Unlike the MLF, the ANF included veto provisions, ensuring that Britain retained operational and decision-making independence. France also had several projects on how the nuclear forces in Europe should be organized. Before France developed its own nuclear weapons, Charles de Gaulle had proposed a trilateral European nuclear project between France, Italy, and West Germany, which didn't work. In the 1960s, France also cherished the idea of a

⁴ Atlantic Nuclear Force Her Majesty's Government Proposal // Wilson Center. June, 1964. URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/atlantic-nuclear-force-her-majestys-government-proposal> (accessed: 08.08.2025).

tripartite directorate led by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, rather than being integrated into a broader NATO structure, as envisioned in the ANF and the earlier Multilateral Force (MLF). De Gaulle's plan aimed to ensure that Europe, particularly France, had a stronger and more autonomous role in nuclear decision-making, rather than being subordinate to American strategic control.

British Nuclear Military Scenarios and Nuclear Arsenal in the 1960s- beginning of the 1970s

The UK's policy efforts in the 1960s focused on enhancing the UK's political and military projection in Europe by developing closer ties with the United States.

Britain's first operational nuclear weapon, the Blue Danube gravity bomb, was deployed in 1956 by the RAF's V-bombers (Valiant, Victor, and Vulcan). Subsequent developments included the Yellow Sun Mk. 2, the UK's first operational thermonuclear weapon (1961-1969), and the Blue Steel missile, the UK's first nuclear missile launched from a V-bomber (1962-1969).

Concerns about the vulnerability of V-bombers to Soviet air defenses led the UK to develop the Blue Streak ground-launched intermediate-range ballistic missile in the mid-1950s.⁵ This program was canceled in 1960 due to concerns about its susceptibility to a preemptive strike. Under the 1962 Nassau Agreement, the U.S. agreed to provide the Polaris missile system to the UK, which completed the British nuclear arsenal with a strategic component.

The Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missile system became operational with the Royal Navy in 1968, leading to the withdrawal of V-bombers from the nuclear role in 1969. Each of the four UK-designed and built Resolution-class nuclear-powered submarines carried 16 Polaris missiles. Initially equipped with modified WE177 warheads, these were replaced in 1982 by the Chevaline warhead. In 1980, the UK decided to procure the Trident C4 missile system to replace the Polaris system, later opting for the more advanced D5 variant in 1982. The UK's nuclear deterrent has evolved from air-launched weapons to submarine-based systems, developed through a close collaboration with the United States.

With regards to its nuclear policy, the UK was searching for a way to accommodate two goals: to continue to benefit from the scientific cooperation with the US, but at the same time to preserve control over its nuclear weapons. The strategic rationale constructed by British officials during the Cold War was that UK nuclear weapons gave NATO a separate center of decision-making in Europe, which the Soviets would need to consider. As British scholar Donald Maclean

⁵ Tregenza A. How capable was the V-Bomber Force militarily of delivering Britain's nuclear deterrent in the late 1950s and 1960s? URL: <https://raf.mod.uk/what-we-do/centre-for-air-and-space-power-studies/aspr/apr-vol7-iss1-7-pdf/?> (accessed: 08.08.2025).

states, “linking up with the US, at least insofar as such linkage could be presented as partnership rather than simple dependence, might allow Britain a great-power-by-proxy status.”⁶

It led the British government to develop the concept of the contribution scenario, which first appeared in the UK Defense White Papers in 1957. This concept meant that British weapons would contribute to US military plans, but operational control would remain with the UK.⁷ The major arguments in support of the contribution scenario were that it would help reduce the financial burden and provide more information about US military plans. As it was explained during one of the modern British Parliamentary debates, British nuclear strategy in the early Cold War period was based upon the concept of “counter-force deterrence,” meaning the ability to strike forces that were targeting the United Kingdom directly. During the thermonuclear period, “deterrence in concert” with the United States involved targeting a mix of military and urban centers.⁸

At the same time, national control of nuclear strike forces was argued to allow targets of immediate importance to the UK’s survival to feature in the joint plans drawn up with the US. The UK’s targeting plans were believed to follow the so-called Moscow Criterion, which required the capability to destroy Moscow and the centralized Soviet command and control system around the city, along with 5 to 10 other major Soviet / Russian cities in a retaliatory nuclear strike. As the same Parliamentary debate states, “The ‘Moscow criterion’ in British nuclear doctrine was perceived by successive Governments as the central requirement of our deterrence.”⁹ British Historian K. Stoddart states that the “Moscow criterion” did not rest just on a narrow obsession with assailing the city itself, but reflected the fact that the characteristics of the Soviet ABM system meant that abandoning the attempt to be seen as capable of defeating it would have entailed conceding effective sanctuary to a vast area around the city - its exact size and configuration depending on the precise azimuth and elevation of the incoming attack . . . in the order of tens of thousands of square miles¹⁰. In contrast, it is thought that US military plans preferred British forces to focus on less significant targets to support the massive American strikes, potentially weakening the overall threat posed by the British deterrent. Additionally, the UK had a broader range of

⁶ Maclean D. British Foreign Policy: The Years Since Suez, 1956-1968. Stein and Day, 1970.

URL: <https://ia804705.us.archive.org/11/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.553384/2015.553384.British-Foreign.pdf> (accessed: 08.08.2025).

⁷ Navias M. The Sandys White Paper 1957 And Move to the British New Look: An Analysis of Nuclear Weapons. Conventional Forces and Strategic Planning 1955-57. URL: <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/2931811/252319.pdf> (accessed: 08.08.2025).

⁸ Nuclear Weapons (International Relations Committee Report) // Motion to Take Note: 16 July, 2019: House of Lords debates – They Work For You. URL: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2019-0716a.174.3&s=nuclear+arms+control#g195.0> (accessed: 09.08.2025).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Stoddart K. Maintaining the “Moscow Criterion”: British Strategic Nuclear Targeting 1974-1979 // Journal of Strategic Studies. Routledge, 2008. Vol. 31, № 6. Pp. 897-924. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/01402390802373198?needAccess=true> (accessed: 10.08.2025).

nuclear tasks at the sub-strategic level, including battlefield assignments to British forces in Germany.

Nevertheless, the UK's willingness to be part of a broader Western deterrent and to maintain a close relationship with the US made it play a more major role in NATO nuclear planning than France. As SIPRI scholar Ian Davis puts it, "the sense of NATO strategic targeting was a predominantly, probably an exclusively, Anglo-American arrangement, even though NATO guidelines for the use of nuclear weapons agreed in 1962 (and known as the Athens Guidelines) require the USA and the UK to consult with allies before using them."¹¹ Throughout the entire period of the Cold War, the UK was aligning with two targeting plans: the national one and the NATO one. Under the NATO targeting plan, which, as some argue, was the product of Anglo-American arrangement, British air-based and land-based nuclear weapons, as well as the submarine-based Polaris (and later Trident) missiles, were assigned to support NATO's collective defense under the alliance's flexible response strategy, which aimed to deter or respond to a Soviet attack at various levels of escalation. For example, under the Nassau agreement (1962), which contained the conditions of the US transfer of Polaris SSBNs to the UK, in a nuclear crisis, British *Polaris* missiles would come under SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) command. At the same time, "ultimate control of the *Polaris* by the UK will not be affected, since control of the firing chain will remain in UK hands; in particular, no submarine commander will be authorised to fire the POLARIS weapons without the Prime Minister's specific authority."^{12,13}

French Nuclear Military Scenarios and Nuclear Arsenal in the 1960s- beginning of the 1970s

Since the inception of its nuclear program, France's goals to develop nuclear weapons were different in priorities than the UK's. The main reason behind the French decision to develop its own arsenal was an aspiration to play a more independent and important role in the bipolar system (while for the UK, it was instead to play a more critical role in NATO). The production of the first French atomic bomb was one of those projects that marked the adoption by France of a new political course: the policy of *grandeur*, proclaimed by de Gaulle after coming to power in 1958. This policy was a response to several events in the 1950s, during which French diplomacy was not always able to achieve the crucial foreign policy objectives that the Fourth Republic had set for

¹¹ Davis I. The British Bomb and NATO: // SIPRI. 2015. P. 16. URL: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/misc/NATO-Trident-Report-15_11.pdf (accessed: 10.08.2025).

¹² Hennessy P. Cabinets and the bomb. Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 213-215.

¹³ Stoddart K. Maintaining the "Moscow Criterion": British Strategic Nuclear Targeting 1974-1979. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/01402390802373198?needAccess=true> (accessed: 10.08.2025).

itself. Thus, the nuclear weapons program served the goal of ensuring the sovereignty and independence of France in the growing bipolar confrontation. As Professor W. Cole from Princeton University wrote, “among his (de Gaulle's) many controversial political decisions, the decision to create French nuclear weapons was perhaps the most symbolic in terms of the general's desire for France to gain an independent role in international politics.”¹⁴ In addition to this, France has also maintained an ambition to play a more significant political role in European and NATO affairs amid the ongoing strengthening of the US-British military alliance. By the mid-1950s, the United States and Great Britain had much more weight in the NATO Council than other member states, including France. France tried proposing to create a triumvirate of powers (France, Great Britain, and the United States) that would distribute power in making military and political decisions of the alliance, but this idea was ultimately rejected by both the UK and the US, which de Gaulle used as a pretext to withdraw from the NATO Nuclear Planning Group.¹⁵ De Gaulle also demanded that France participate in decision-making on the use of nuclear weapons in the event of a major war and opposed the fact that US nuclear weapons in Europe were controlled exclusively by Washington. From the US perspective, the French partnership was untrustworthy and sometimes opportunistic. This caution in the bilateral relationships was maintained throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Initially, the French Air Force was equipped with AN-11 and later AN-22 gravity bombs, carried by Mirage IV strategic bombers, ensuring an initial airborne deterrent. By the mid-1960s, France expanded its capabilities by developing land-based ballistic missiles, leading to the deployment of S2 IRBMs (Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles) in 1971 at the Plateau d'Albion. Simultaneously, France pursued a sea-based deterrent, launching its first nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, *Le Redoutable*, in 1971, equipped with M1 SLBMs (Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles).

France has always claimed to be able to inflict irreparable damage if attacked by Moscow. The French scenario of nuclear strikes on Moscow has evolved together with the technological development of its nuclear arsenal. Until 1971, France was able to deliver only tactical nuclear weapons borne by the *Mirage* aircrafts and was somewhat dependent on the US for the second strike. The deployment of the first French SSBN, *Le Redoutable*, along with the first IRBM missiles on *Plateau Albion* launchers, provided France with an opportunity for a second strike. However, the range of the first SSBN was quite limited – 2,500 km, which meant that it couldn't

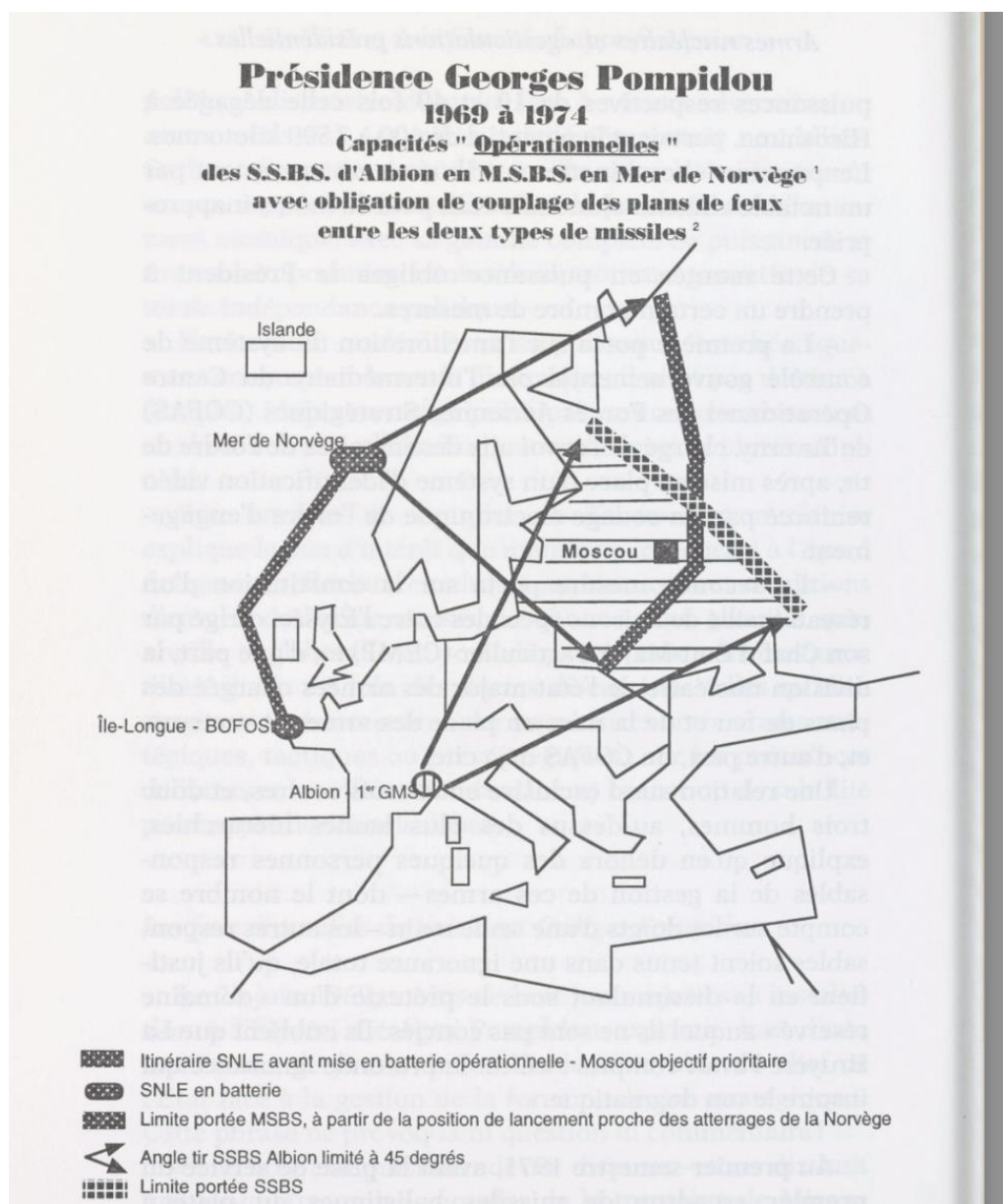
¹⁴ French Nuclear Diplomacy // Princeton University Press, 2016. P. 21. URL: <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691646893/french-nuclear-diplomacy> (accessed: 10.08.2025).

¹⁵ Sayle T. Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order // Cornell University Press, 2019. P. 50. URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7591/j.ctvdtph2f.6.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A67071ca965251b16f1d3c2d7af632821&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1 (accessed: 11.08.2025).

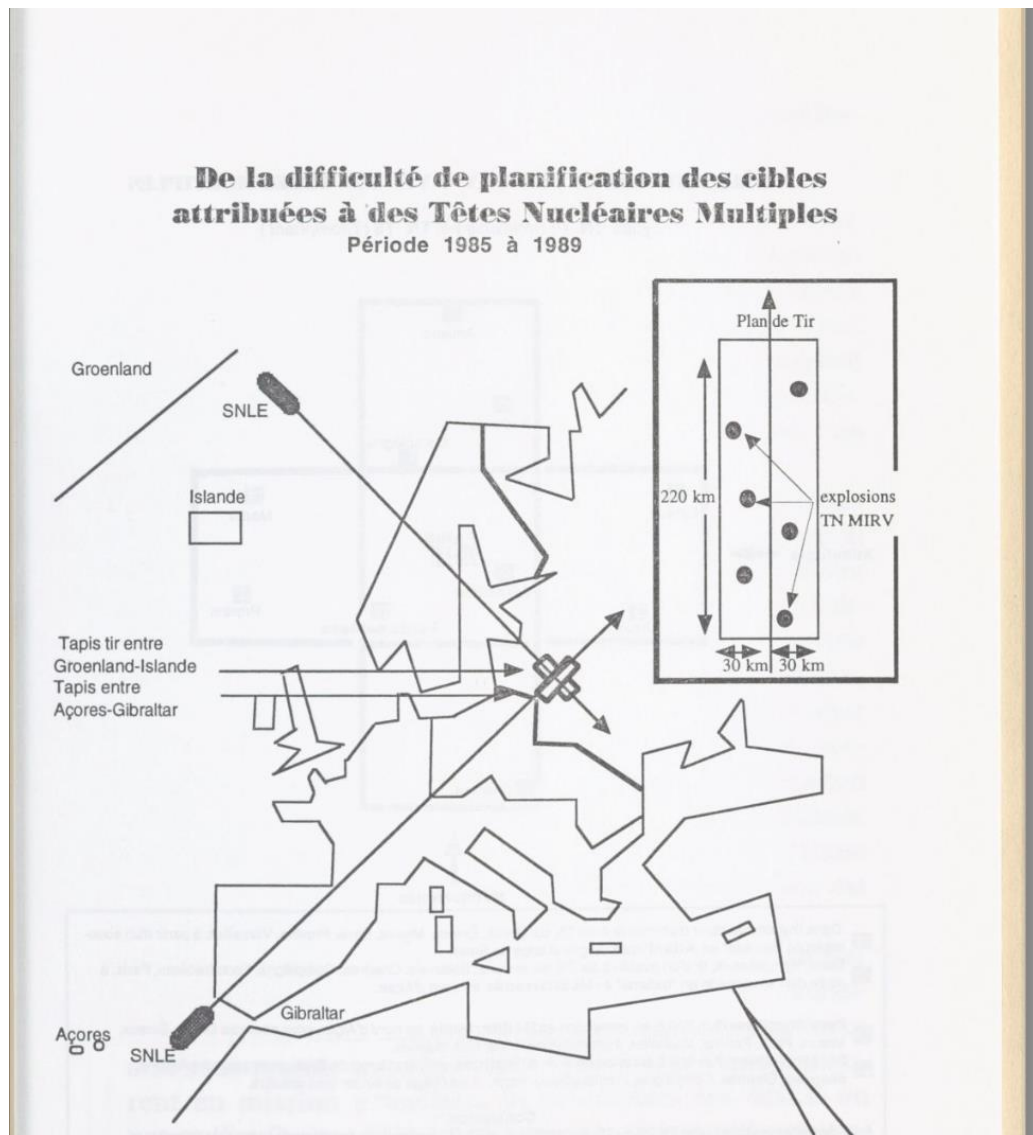
reach Moscow from any location it was stationed. Thus, it was assumed that the strike would be made from the Norwegian Sea, where an SSBN would go from its base at Ile-Longue. In order not to lose time and assets while the SSBN would be traveling, the land-based IRBMs would be able to cover the Moscow region with their own nuclear strikes. The strike by the SSBNs was expected to be more massive, first because of more powerful nuclear warheads deployed on the SLBMs and second because of the larger angle and range of attack (2800 km), with Saint Petersburg being the most Northern of and Krasnodar the most Southern (while the Albion missiles had only a 45-degree attack angle). The image below shows the intersection of areas covered by the sea and land-based components.

With the development of the sea component (improvement of the range, speed, and accuracy of the French SLBMs, deployment of MIRV in the payload, and construction of five more SSBNs), Plateau d'Albion lost its strategic importance, and according to some documents, it wasn't raised in the SALT-II negotiations¹⁶. Now, the cross-strikes would be carried out by two SSBNs, with one launching from the North Atlantic near Greenland and the other from near the Strait of Gibraltar.

¹⁶ Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council. Historical Documents - Office of the Historian, 1974. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d47> (accessed: 11.08.2025).



Source: Theleri M. *Initiation à la force de frappe française 1945-2010* // Éditions Stock, 1987. P. 215.



Source: Theleri M. *Initiation à la force de frappe française 1945-2010* // Éditions Stock, 1987. P. 47.

The French view on its nuclear arsenal also widely differed from the US one. France believed that the presence of a third nuclear power would reduce the risk of a major nuclear war between the two great powers. As the general Beaufré, one of the ideologists of the French nuclear strategy, pointed out, “the existence of the third partner limits the freedom of action of the other two; it is a dissuasive factor, since the ‘nuclear’ decision has three poles, and no longer just two.”¹⁷

At the same time, the French doctrine envisaged deterrence not only as a means against military attack, but also against political coercion or blackmail by any state, which later became known as the principle of all-out (*tous azimuts*) deterrence. As Charles de Gaulle once said, “The

¹⁷ Némio J. Deterrence and strategy // *Revue Défense Nationale*, 1965. URL: <https://www.defnat.com/e-RDN/vue-article.php?article=19237&cidrevue=232> (accessed: 13.08.2025). [Dissuasion et stratégie].

deterrent force is not made only to deter an aggressor. It is also made to deter an abusive protector. This is why it must be *tous azimuts*. Besides, we never know where the threat may come from, nor where the pressure or blackmail may come from. However, until the 1980s, French SLBMs weren't able to reach US soil. There also hasn't been any evidence that France considered the scenario of a nuclear war against the US afterwards".

Thus, both the British and French nuclear programs were driven not only by the need for self-defense against the Soviet missile threat but also by broader political and strategic considerations within the context of transatlantic and bipolar relations. By the 1970s, both countries' nuclear programs were still in their early stages, with limited capability to deliver strategic weapons to Soviet territory. Their submarine programs were underway, but no submarines were deployed until the early 1970s. In this context, maintaining sovereignty over their nuclear arsenals and advancing their strategic capabilities to achieve minimal deterrence against the Soviet Union became even more critical. It was against this backdrop that the SALT I negotiations began.

CHAPTER I. THE ISSUE OF OFFSET OF THE BRITISH AND FRENCH ARSENALS IN THE SALT I NEGOTIATIONS

The period between the late 1960s and the late 1970s entered history as the era of *détente*, following a phase of heightened tensions between the Soviet and Western blocs. By the late 1960s, both the Soviet Union and the United States were facing several regional crises, including the Vietnam War, the Middle East conflict, the Prague Spring, and conflicts in Africa. After Nixon came to power in 1969, he proclaimed the course of *détente* with the Soviet Union. Soon, *détente* was also integrated into the European policy towards the Eastern Bloc.

The US policy of *détente* wasn't its own purpose. It had two goals: restraining the rise of Soviet power and improving the US image in the world, which the Vietnam War had shaken. By the beginning of the 1970s, the Soviet Union reached parity with the US in terms of nuclear warheads, but both countries continued nuclear arsenal expansion. The United States was increasingly concerned about the Soviet Union's development of ICBMs and ABM systems. By the late 1960s, the Soviet Union was deploying 200-250 new silo-based ICBMs annually¹⁸.

Besides, the war in Vietnam and its consequences on the US influence in the world made the administration seek more leverage for improving its political image as a peace-builder, which is why Nixon called *détente* "a structure for peace." In this regard, Washington was seeking instruments to create more interdependencies between the West and the Soviet Union, thereby improving global and regional security. Some historians argue that regional dynamics were a more significant factor in the *détente* at that time. As Raymond Garthoff puts it, Nixon's readiness, even in May 1972, to forgo a summit meeting and a Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) agreement, if that proved to be the price, rather than to give up intensified bombing of North Vietnam¹⁹.

For the US and the Soviet Union, negotiations had three primary objectives: developing a framework to manage the advancement of offensive capabilities and ABM systems, curbing the arms race by imposing mutual limitations on modernization efforts, and laying the groundwork for future arms control agreements.

The Interim agreement concluded in 1972 covered all three questions. The Interim Agreement froze each side's number of ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) at current levels for five years²⁰. The United States was limited to 710 SLBM launch tubes, from its base level of 656 SLBM launch tubes, and no more than 44 modern ballistic missile submarines. The Soviet Union was limited to 950 SLBM launch tubes, from its base level of 740

¹⁸ Noble B.&. The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union // Barnes & Noble. P. 2. URL: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-big-five-alexander-g-savelyev/1132777960> (accessed: 15.08.2025).

¹⁹ Garthoff R. Detente and Confrontation // Brookings Institution Press, 2011. P. 29.

²⁰ Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Cold War Arms Control Negotiations // Britannica. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Interim-Agreement>. (accessed: 11.08.2025).

SLBM launch tubes, and no more than 62 modern ballistic missile submarines. Additionally, the Interim Agreement limited the construction of additional fixed land-based intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers. The agreement also mentioned the Soviet concerns regarding the nuclear weapons deployment in Europe.

In France and the UK, the news about the SALT talks were met with caution. Both countries viewed the entire SALT process as an attempt to define strategic stability within a bipolar world structure. From the European perspective, this was a dangerous path. Firstly, it failed to assign strategic importance to the European theater, leaving it in a vulnerable position. Secondly, Europeans had concerns that having arms control agreement with the Soviet Union might weaken U.S. security guarantees in Europe. This was because the U.S. might become less willing to respond with a nuclear strike in the event of a conventional war in Europe.

During consultations with their American counterparts, European allies also criticized the U.S. for failing to develop a clear doctrine on the use of tactical nuclear weapons, which further deepened their suspicions.

Against this backdrop, both France and the UK felt the need to strengthen Europe's political and military significance through closer cooperation. Changes in the political leadership in London and Paris also contributed to this trend. In the United Kingdom, Edward Heath's Conservative government came to power in 1970 with a clear intention to strengthen European ties, facilitating Britain's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC). Unlike his predecessor, Harold Wilson, Heath was more open to discussing defense matters with European allies, including nuclear issues. He also did not condition nuclear cooperation with France on NATO structures, giving preference to deeper bilateral ties.

France, under Georges Pompidou, also adopted a more pragmatic approach to alliances compared to Charles de Gaulle. Pompidou sought to leverage allied policy as a strategic asset rather than strictly aligning it with France's vision of the European Community and European defense. After assuming office, he agreed to open negotiations with Britain regarding European Community (EC) membership. He was also more willing to foster closer military ties with the UK. In 1969, Pompidou stated: "The future of a common European nuclear defense policy lies in an agreement between France and Great Britain. I am quite ready to talk to the United Kingdom about such an agreement (...). But it will take time, and Europe must first develop a political conscience."²¹

²¹ Tertrais B. Entente Nucleaire: Options for UK-French Nuclear Cooperation // Discussion Paper 3 of the BASIC Trident Commission. BASIC, 2019. P. 10. URL: https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/entente_nucleaire_basic_trident_commission.pdf (accessed: 04.08.2025).

Both the UK and France saw détente as an opportunity to enhance Europe's role on the global stage by increasing cooperation and bolstering their own military and economic potential.

I.1 Emergence of the Issue of Accountability of French and British Nuclear Strategic Arsenals During the SALT-I Talks

From the outset of the SALT-I talks, the United States and the Soviet Union had differing views on the European agenda. At the time, there was no established framework for arms control agreements, nor was there a clear definition of “strategic weapons.” The U.S. favored a bilateral approach, focusing solely on setting the ceilings between the two superpowers. At the same time, the Soviet Union pushed for a broader perspective that included NATO’s nuclear forces in Europe, as well as those of the United Kingdom and France. This was a strategic move by Soviet diplomacy to compel NATO to acknowledge that the nuclear arsenals of its members had direct strategic implications for the USSR. Throughout the SALT negotiations, the Soviet Union consistently advocated for an expanded definition of strategic weapons. However, it is likely that they did not fully anticipate the lasting impact this conceptual debate would have on future negotiations. At the SALT-I talks, the issue of nuclear forces in Europe was not discussed closely, but it was mentioned several times by Soviet diplomacy. The question of the British and French nuclear forces appeared first in the US archival documents on the SALT-I from 1970. However, the basic argumentation was formulated by the Soviet side during this period, and the antagonism regarding this agenda item remained throughout the SALT-II process.

When it came to the European theatre, three outstanding issues raised concerns from the Soviet Union: the forward-based systems, the inclusion of British and French nuclear forces in the negotiations, and the cooperation between the US and its allies in the nuclear military field.

The Soviet Union was concerned over the developing strategic disparity between the Soviet and NATO forces in Europe, especially when it came to the so-called “forward-based systems” located in Europe. By the “forward-based systems”, the Soviet Union implied all NATO nuclear capabilities that could reach Soviet soil, i.e., NATO nuclear bombs and cruise missiles located in Europe²². As Stephen Millett puts it, “in this ideological frame of reference, the Soviets viewed American FBS as a potential first-strike force against the USSR. They saw little distinction between the United States and its NATO allies, since they believed that the Americans totally dominated their treaty allies. From the Soviet vantage point, the American FBS, as well as British

²² Millett S.M. Forward-Based Nuclear Weapons and SALT I // *Political Science Quarterly*, 1983. Vol. 98, № 1. Pp. 79-97. URL: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2150206> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

and French nuclear forces, were largely integrated systems under American operational command.”²³

The US had diverging positions on FBS with its allies, which was one of the reasons for the European discontent over the way the US conducted negotiations with the Soviet Union. The US was reluctant to include the FBS item in the talks. They doubted the sincerity of the Soviet concerns over these capabilities, as in the American argumentation, they were unable to inflict irreparable damage. As Raymond Garthoff writes, the US later acknowledged the viability of the Soviet arguments; however, by then, the Soviet tactical nuclear arsenal had already outnumbered the US one²⁴. In view of the growing Soviet tactical arsenal, the Europeans, conversely, were eager to see this issue included in the talks.

From the Soviet perspective, around 7000 tactical nuclear warheads presented a strategic threat as they targeted important military, industrial, and leadership sites. Additionally, the Soviet Union was concerned about US nuclear submarines, which operated in European waters from bases at Rota, Spain, and Holy Loch, Scotland. It was in closer proximity to the USSR than Soviet submarines were to the US.

The second question that raised concerns from the Soviet side, connected to the European theatre, was cooperation between the US and the UK, as well as the US and France, in the nuclear military field.

At the end of the 1960s, both France and the UK were modernizing their nuclear forces. At that time, their delivery systems were lagging behind both the US and the Soviet ones, and, in fact, were instead at the beginning stage. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent was transitioning from air-launched weapons to submarine-launched ballistic missile systems. The Royal Navy commissioned four Resolution-class ballistic missile submarines between 1967 and 1969, each armed with 16 Polaris A-3 missiles. In 1967, the UK initiated the *Chevaline* project, which aimed to improve the system's ability to penetrate Soviet anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defenses by introducing decoys and other countermeasures to increase the warheads' survivability. France was also upgrading its capabilities by pursuing a submarine program. On the maritime front, France commissioned its first ballistic missile submarine, *Le Redoutable*, in 1971. Besides, at the time of the SALT-I talks were taking place, it was preparing to deploy *Pluton* short-range ballistic missiles, primarily aimed at deterring a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Thus, both British and French strategic nuclear forces were in a cradle by the time the US and the USSR started to negotiate. Thus, their primary interest was to have the right to develop them to the extent that they can inflict significant damage after the second strike.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Garthoff R. SALT and the Soviet Military // Problems of Communism, 1975. № 24. Pp. 21-37, 32.

The third issue that was a key concern for London and Paris during the SALT negotiations was the issue of scientific cooperation between the United States on one side and the United Kingdom and France on the other. The Soviet Union, aware of British and French nuclear developments, pressured the U.S. to halt or limit its collaboration with both countries. Although neither the SALT I nor the SALT II treaties included such a restriction, the U.S. reportedly became more cautious in providing technical assistance during the negotiations. The potential prohibition of MIRV technology under the SALT prompted Britain and France to explore alternative solutions for their nuclear delivery systems. In 1971, France reached an agreement with the U.S. on nuclear matters, though it did not include MIRV technology, leaving France behind Britain in terms of submarine force capability. Seeking to bridge this gap, France turned to the UK for scientific cooperation. British Prime Minister Edward Heath was also eager to pursue nuclear collaboration with France, hoping it would pressure the U.S. to provide Britain with an upgrade to its Polaris system.

Both countries, fearing that continued U.S.-Soviet arms control talks could further limit their access to American support, began developing their own scientific exchanges. In 1973, they seriously considered a joint missile program for the first time. However, existing commitments, cost concerns, and political realities ultimately prevented such a project. Despite a period of relative harmony, the differing political trajectories of Britain and France in the Cold War made deep nuclear collaboration difficult. For example, the discussions between the British and French general staffs in 1972 and 1973 exposed deep disagreements from the beginning on NATO's flexible response strategy. Besides, the UK was still closer to the US than to France, which made it hard to develop any discreet and trustworthy cooperation. Even on issues that were not considered a major secret, the UK had to consult the US. When the French Navy, while building its SSBN fleet, sought British expertise on managing onboard living conditions, Washington blocked any British response.

The SALT negotiations underscored the strategic dilemmas faced by Britain and France, as they navigated their roles within a nuclear order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. While both countries sought to maintain and modernize their nuclear deterrents, they faced limitations imposed by their reliance on American technology and the broader constraints of U.S.-Soviet arms control discussions. The Soviet push to include British and French arsenals in the negotiations, along with concerns over U.S.-European nuclear cooperation, highlighted the geopolitical stakes for London and Paris. These pressures prompted efforts at closer bilateral cooperation; yet, enduring political, strategic, and institutional differences ultimately prevented the development of a fully integrated European nuclear strategy. The tensions between autonomy and alliance persisted, reinforcing the reality that, despite their ambitions to play a more significant

role in European defense, Britain and France remained separate players in the Cold War's nuclear balance. Ultimately, the SALT-I talks already exposed the limits of European influence in arms control diplomacy.

I.2 SALT-II Negotiations

Following Article VII of the Interim Agreement, which obligated both parties to continue active negotiations on strategic offensive arms, the SALT II talks commenced in November 1972. The primary objective of the SALT II was to replace the Interim Agreement with a long-term, comprehensive treaty that would establish broad limitations on strategic offensive weapons systems. As negotiations began, the United States aimed to ensure equal numbers of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles for both sides, initiate the reduction of these delivery vehicles, and impose restrictions on qualitative advancements.

The entire SALT process represented a competition between two evolving views on strategic stability, which involved shaping definitions of strategic systems, irreparable damage, and the connection between nuclear and conventional systems. During the SALT negotiations in 1969, the Soviet Union defined any weapon capable of delivering ordnance to the other country's homeland as a strategic weapon, regardless of its launch location. However, there was still an ongoing debate regarding which systems should be included in this definition, particularly concerning the European theater.

The differences in views were primarily caused by the distinct structures of US and Soviet nuclear forces and their geographical locations. The US was known to rely on the submarine leg of the nuclear triad, while the USSR focused on land-based ICBMs. At that time, Soviet missiles lagged behind US missiles in terms of strike precision, which is why the Soviets were developing heavier missiles to increase the circular error probable (CEP) of their systems. They attempted to achieve this by developing MIRV technology and improving the payload capacity of their forces. The rapid development of the Soviet ICBM force heightened US concerns about the survivability of their counterforce strikes, as the Soviet Union possessed an advantage in "residual potential," which is the combined throw weight of the strategic launchers remaining after an initial nuclear attack.

When it came to the European theater, as Raymond Garthoff states, "the US propensity to judge such matters in terms of its own focus on the intercontinental strategic balance still obscured recognition of the Soviet view of its requirements for Eurasian theaters of operations." The rising concern in the US was the development of intermediate forces by the Soviet Union and its allies, as well as concerns over US guarantees.

One of the new concerns for the US regarding Europe was the new Soviet bomber, the Backfire, developed by the Soviet Union, which could reach US territory if refueled in the air. The Backfire (Tupolev Tu-22M) had a controversial classification. It was designed for both strategic and maritime strike missions and had an operational range of approximately 7,000 km (4,350 miles) without in-flight refueling, according to the US estimates. Its armament included long-range cruise missiles such as the Kh-22 (AS-4 *Kitchen*, with a 600 km range), a supersonic, nuclear-capable anti-ship missile, and the Kh-15 (AS-16 *Kickback*, with a 300 km range). This high-speed, short-range missile could carry either nuclear or conventional warheads.

The Soviet Union claimed that the Backfire was a medium-range bomber designed primarily for regional missions, particularly in Europe and Asia, and therefore should not be considered a strategic weapon subject to the SALT II limitations. However, the United States argued that the Backfire's extended range, in-flight refueling capability, and capacity to carry nuclear payloads enabled it to strike targets within the US homeland. Technically, this assumption was correct. Strategically, however, it made little sense to send heavy bombers to US territory, both from a first- and second-strike perspective.

Additionally, in terms of payload, the Backfire did not present as much of a threat as Soviet ICBMs and SLBMs. By the mid-1970s, the USSR had about 160 Backfire bombers, each capable of carrying up to two cruise missiles. In contrast, the US had nearly 500 bombers at that time. Even considering the Soviet advantage in payload capacity, strategic bombers constituted a significantly smaller share of the overall discrepancy.

U.S. AND USSR STRATEGIC FORCE LEVELS, MID-1974 AND MID-1975

Type of Force	Operational in Mid-1974	Operational in Mid-1975
	U.S.	USSR
Offensive		
ICBM Launchers	1054	1575
SLBM Launchers	656	660
Intercontinental Bombers	496	140
Total	2206	2375
SSBN Submarines	41	47-50
Missile Throwweight (ICBM & SLBM) (in million lbs)	3.8	6.5
Force Loadings (warheads & bombs)	7940	2600
Defensive		
ABM Launchers	0	64
SAM Launchers	261	9800
Air-Defense Interceptors	532	2600
Surveillance Radars	67	4000

Source: 1. Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Report, US - USSR Offensive Strategic Force Balance: Evolution and Measurement 1965-1976, SR 76-10248, November 1976, Secret, Excised Copy // National Security Archive. URL: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/28628-document-20-central-intelligence-agency-intelligence-report-us-ussr-offensive>

US allies, particularly Germany, were especially insistent that the Backfire be included in the agenda. Europeans viewed the Backfire as a response to developments in NATO's nuclear forces and sought assurance that the US would protect their interests during the negotiations. While the US tried to keep this item on the agenda, it never pushed hard for specific limitations on Backfire launchers. As indicated in a US congressional hearing, Kissinger barely touched on the

Backfire issue during the Vladivostok meeting because the US had “a superiority of over 500 forward-based systems in Europe, plus the substantial forces of the United Kingdom and France.”²⁵ The USSR also preferred not to raise the issue of forward-based systems (FBS) at an early stage of the talks. As Thomas Wolfe notes, the FBS issue received “comparatively low attention” at the Moscow summit in 1974²⁶.

In addition to US superiority in tactical nuclear weapons, Washington planned to develop longer-range cruise missiles for B-52 bombers. The Soviet side insisted that the treaty address future deployments. The US could not agree to that but proposed allowing tests of missiles with a range below 2,550 km, which the Soviets refused. According to a Washington Post article, the Soviet Union agreed to limit the number of heavy bombers to 225 launchers in 1976²⁷; however, it subsequently withdrew its agreement due to the US’s reluctance to concede on the cruise missile issue. Following that proposal, the Soviet Union revisited the issue of FBS, as well as the French and British nuclear arsenals.

The United States presented an alternative proposal for a SALT II agreement, similar to the framework agreed upon at Vladivostok, with the issues related to the Backfire and cruise missiles deferred until the SALT III²⁸. Ultimately, a compromise was reached that heavy bombers would fall under the agreement if they were equipped with ballistic or cruise missiles with a range of over 600 km. This effectively meant that the Soviets provided assurances that the Backfire would not be equipped for intercontinental missions, although the treaty did not formally verify this.

In return, the Soviet Union considered the Backfire an adequate response to European tactical nuclear forces. Moreover, by the mid-1970s, Soviet nuclear warhead production had reached a point where the USSR was poised to outnumber NATO’s tactical nuclear arsenal within a few years. Moscow also recognized that the Backfire outperformed NATO air force capabilities in Europe, making it advantageous to keep it in a gray zone. The Europeans were unsatisfied with how the Backfire issue was resolved.

Regarding the British and French nuclear forces, although this issue was being raised occasionally over the entirety of the SALT-II talks, there seemed to be no elaborate discussions

²⁵ The SALT II Treaty: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-Sixth Congress, First Session on EX. Y, 96-1 I, 1979. URL: https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=ustreaties&handle=hein.congrec/salty0001&id=257&men_tab=srchres ults (accessed: 03.08.2025).

²⁶ Wolfe T. The SALT Experience: Its Impact on U.S. and Soviet Strategic Policy and Decision-making. 1975. URL: <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2006/R1686.pdf> (accessed: 02.08.2025).

²⁷ Backfire APT to be Big SALT debate. The Washington Post, 1979. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88-01315R000400360083-1.pdf> (accessed: 22.08.2025).

²⁸ Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) // U.S. Department of State. URL: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/5195.htm#:~:text=The%20principal%20U.S.%20objectives%20as,which%20could%20threaten%20future%20stability> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

on the issue. The Soviet Union might not have prioritized this question for several reasons. First, at that time, the Soviet Union likely viewed this issue as a leverage to influence discussions about the Backfire, since after the *Backfire* went off the agenda, Moscow wasn't that vocal about their concerns about the French and British nuclear arsenals. Both British and French forces were still in the development stage, with their submarine forces under construction and their payloads significantly lower than the Soviet arsenal. As shown in the table below, even when combining the French and British strategic arsenals with those of the US, they remained significantly smaller than that of the Soviet Union.

British and French Forces Estimated Throw weights

Country	SSBNs (1975)	SLBMs per SSBN	Total SLBMs	Warheads per SLBM	Total Warheads	Throw Weight per Missile (lbs)	Estimated Total Throw Weight (million lbs)
France	4	16	64	1	64	3,300	~0.211
Britain	4	16	64	3	192	2,750	~0.176

Calculations: in the case of France's SLBM force in 1975, each of the four Redoutable-class submarines carried 16 M1/M2 SLBMs, totaling 64 missiles. Each missile had a throw weight of 3,300 lbs (1.65 tons), leading to a total throw weight of $64 \times 3,300 = 211,200$ lbs (~0.211 million lbs). Since each missile carried a single warhead, the total number of warheads was 64. This calculation illustrates how France's SLBM force focused on fewer, heavier warheads rather than multiple independently targetable warheads (MIRVs), which were a key feature of U.S. and Soviet systems at the time.

For Britain, the Resolution-class SSBNs each carried 16 Polaris A-3 SLBMs, also totaling 64 missiles. However, the Polaris A-3 missile had a lower individual throw weight of 2,750 lbs (1.375 tons), resulting in a total throw weight of $64 \times 2,750 = 176,000$ lbs (~0.176 million lbs). Unlike France, Britain's Polaris A-3 missiles were MIRVs (Multiple Reentry Vehicles), each carrying three warheads, bringing the total warhead count to 192

Estimated nuclear warhead stockpiles for the United States, Soviet Union/Russia, United Kingdom, and France from 1970 to 1990

YEAR	US	USSR	UK	FRANCE
1970	26,008	11,643	394	36
1975	27,519	19,055	492	188
1980	23,368	30,062	492	250
1985	21,392	39,197	422	360

Source: Norris R.S., Arkin W.M. Global Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945-2000 // Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. SAGE Publications, 2000. Vol. 56, № 2. P. 79-79. URL: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2968/056002019?utm.com>

Western European nations, particularly NATO member states, closely observed the SALT II negotiations with both interest and apprehension. A principal concern was that the treaty focused exclusively on the strategic arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union. Some European policymakers viewed these negotiations as an attempt to institutionalize nuclear competition between the two superpowers, while establishing a framework for strategic stability that primarily served the interests of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The exclusion of European allies from the negotiation process generated considerable discontent across various European capitals.

As historian Beatrice Heuser observes, “As part of these moves, and taking advantage of the improvement in their relations just before the beginning of the Yom Kippur War (6-24 October 1973), the Soviet Union and the United States signed an agreement on the prevention of nuclear war in 1973. The United States’ allies were not consulted, which heightened the feeling among European governments that they had been overlooked, especially in Bonn.”²⁹ This lack of consultation reinforced European anxieties regarding their marginalization in critical security decisions that had direct implications for the continent’s defense posture.

Although the limitation of strategic nuclear arsenals contributed to mitigating the risk of global nuclear war, a parallel debate emerged regarding the treaty’s potentially destabilizing consequences for the European security landscape. The central argument was that by reducing the likelihood of a direct superpower nuclear confrontation at the strategic level, the United States

²⁹ Heuser B. NATO, Britain, France, and the FRG: nuclear strategies and forces for Europe, 1949-2000 // New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997. P. 21. URL: <https://archive.org/details/natobritainfranc0000heus> (accessed: 22.08.2025).

might become increasingly reluctant to employ nuclear weapons in defense of Europe in a regional conflict. As U.S. scholar Robert Pfaltzgraff asserts, “Whatever view Europeans might hold about the trends in the U.S.-Soviet strategic relationship, there is little doubt that, in general, they see these trends as coinciding with a decline in the willingness or capacity of the United States to maintain its leadership role in the Alliance.”³⁰

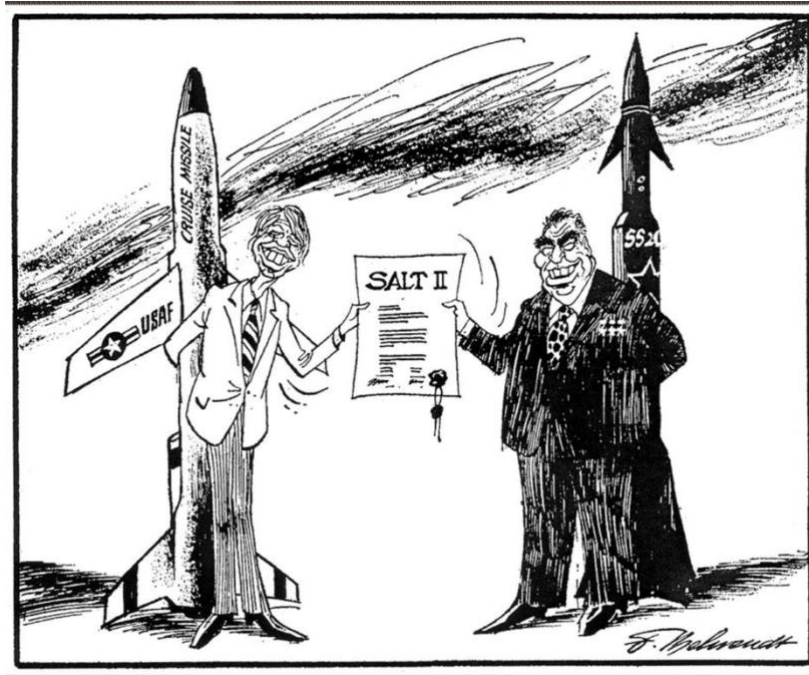
From the European perspective, the agreement rendered the United States and the Soviet Union into sanctuaries, implicitly increasing the probability of any future conflict being waged primarily on Western European territory. Consequently, European policymakers favored a deterrence strategy that maintained a low nuclear threshold and underscored NATO’s capacity to inflict unacceptable damage on the Soviet Union. This approach, predicated on the principle of retribution rather than denial, was viewed as essential to ensuring the credibility of NATO’s extended deterrence commitments.

The failure of the agreement to adequately address the threat posed by Soviet intermediate-range missiles targeting Europe, and in effect, granting the Soviet Union a carte blanche for its continued development, intensified skepticism regarding the strategic benefits of the SALT II, particularly in West Germany. Criticism mounted as policymakers and analysts questioned whether the treaty sufficiently safeguarded European security interests.

This concern was echoed in contemporary media discourse. In 1979, *Der Spiegel* observed that “SALT II does more than set limits; it establishes ceilings that give enough scope for a new variant on the arms race.”³¹ This statement underscored the apprehension that the treaty’s prescribed force ceilings exceeded the then-current levels of strategic arsenals, thereby affording the Soviet Union the opportunity to expand its nuclear forces, including those of intermediate range, rather than imposing meaningful constraints. Consequently, for many in Europe, the SALT II was perceived not as a genuine step toward arms control but rather as a framework that reinforced superpower dominance while failing to mitigate the specific threats faced by NATO allies.

³⁰ Pfaltzgraff R.L. Western Europe and the SALT II Treaty: An American View // The Fletcher Forum. The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1980. Vol. 4, № 1. P. 99-108. URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/45330984.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A817598b8b1a3781df7e4cfd4083ec418&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1 (accessed: 21.08.2025).

³¹ Salt II: the great illusion of disarmament. *Der Spiegel*, 11 June 1979. URL: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/salt_ii_the_great_illusion_of_disarmament_from_der_spiegel_11_june_1979-en-39457e8b-f4d2-49bc-8399-f8df60b85423.html (accessed: 04.08.2025).



A German daily newspaper, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, shows the US President, Jimmy Carter, and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, hiding intermediate-range missiles behind their backs while holding the SALT-II agreement.³²

For both Britain and France, the continuation of the SALT negotiations carried an ambivalence. On one hand, they aligned with the broader European perspective that the SALT process reinforced a bipolar framework, privileging U.S.-Soviet strategic stability while neglecting the security concerns of the European theater. On the other hand, by the time the SALT II negotiations commenced, both nations had successfully developed their own strategic nuclear arsenals, affording them a greater degree of security against Soviet intermediate-range threats compared to other European states. Consequently, their non-participation in the negotiations held both symbolic and practical significance.

From a symbolic standpoint, direct involvement in U.S.-Soviet negotiations risked reducing Britain and France to mere bargaining chips in a superpower-dominated strategic competition. Including British and French nuclear forces under the same limitations as U.S. arsenals was perceived as a threat to their independent deterrents, potentially making them more reliant on U.S. nuclear capabilities and diminishing their capacity for an autonomous retaliatory strike. Such inclusion would necessitate adjustments to their war planning, aligning their nuclear doctrines more closely with U.S. strategic imperatives.

³² Cartoon by Behrendt on the SALT II disarmament agreement: Image // CVCE.EU, 1979. URL: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/78da524f-5132-4a6e-9e4d-c87163099075/Resources> (accessed: 05.08.2025).

Beyond these strategic concerns, both British and French military officials were apprehensive that the negotiations might impose restrictions on the development of their submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), which were still undergoing modernization. In the 1970s, France's SLBMs lacked the range to reach Soviet territory from their home bases, prompting efforts to develop the next generation of missiles. Following the election of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, France deepened its cooperation with the United States in the realm of submarine technology. This collaboration encompassed intelligence-sharing on Soviet submarine patrol routes, advancements in sonar and anti-submarine warfare, and access to U.S. expertise in nuclear reactor miniaturization knowledge that later contributed to the development of France's Triomphant-class SSBNs.

France's growing interest in strengthening its technological and strategic partnership with the United States has been cited as a key factor in its decision to abstain from participating in the SALT III negotiations³³.

In contrast, British submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capabilities were significantly more advanced than their French counterparts. By the 1970s, the British Polaris A3 SLBM, deployed on *Resolution*-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), had a range of approximately 4,600 km, surpassing the French M1 (3,000 km) and later M20 (3,600 km) missiles. In addition to a superior range, British SLBMs were equipped with multiple re-entry vehicles (MRVs), further enhancing their strategic effectiveness. By the time of the Nixon administration, Britain was actively seeking to upgrade its Polaris system to enhance its ability to penetrate Soviet anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defenses in the event of war³⁴.

Possibly due to the superior performance of British SLBMs or Britain's close alignment with the United States, Soviet officials expressed greater concern about British submarines than their French counterparts. Henry Kissinger recalled that during the preliminary discussions leading up to the Vladivostok Summit in 1974, "Brezhnev...strongly indicated that his primary concern was with British SLBMs, implying that he would be willing to overlook the French SLBMs."³⁵ The U.S. delegation acknowledged the legitimacy of Soviet concerns. In a memorandum to President Gerald Ford, Kissinger noted, "It is difficult to see how the Soviets can ignore British and French SLBMs, which are clearly no threat to us but a threat to them."³⁶

³³ Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume XXXIII, 1969-1976. URL: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/pg_979 (accessed: 07.08.2025).

³⁴ The British Bomb and the United States - Part One // National Security Archive. URL: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2021-05-13/british-bomb-united-states-part-one> (accessed: 09.08.2025).

³⁵ Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d85> (accessed: 13.08.2025).

³⁶ Ibid.

The US-Soviet monopoly over strategic deterrence definitions relegated both countries to the role of medium (non-strategic) nuclear powers with common interests. The lag in the development of both British and French forces, uncertainty about how the talks would address European interests, and a common goal to counter both the Soviet threat and the American monopoly had the effect of bringing countries closer together over the period of the talks. Speaking at the *Financial Times* Conference on 14 December 1972, Soames stated that “united we have the chance for us to fill again the vacuum we left in the world over the past decades.”³⁷

French Foreign Minister with Maurice Schuman was charged with overseeing the construction of a “nuclear monarchy.” Despite being a committed Gaullist during the 1960s, Schuman was a dedicated Euro-Atlanticist and pressed for further cooperation between France and its cross-channel partner over nuclear affairs. Schuman considered a joint Franco-British deterrent essential for combating the Soviet nuclear threat, despite the existence of the NPT.³⁸

The Soviet Union, recognizing its superiority in payload and content, acknowledged some progress in discussions on strategic ceilings. However, it chose not to escalate matters with French and British forces after Vladivostok. This did not mean, however, that the issue was removed from the agenda. When signing the SALT II treaty in 1979, Brezhnev made it clear that future strategic negotiations would not proceed without the participation of the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, although the SALT II was never ratified, its legacy underscored the enduring European concerns over superpower control over international security issues and reinforced the push for greater nuclear autonomy from the US and European cooperation. The SALT I and II accords deepened concerns about the linkage between superpower strategic balance and European security, formalizing the existing U.S.-Soviet strategic parity, which in turn weakened the role of the U.S. strategic force in ensuring allied security. Coupled with the defense policies and the French and British ambitions, the collateral effect of a series of agreements was temporary decoupling from reliance on the US security guarantees.

Thus, while both the UK and France shared concerns over the US-Soviet talks, they also viewed the U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations as a means to interfere with their own nuclear strategies. Over the course of the 1970s, Franco-British discussions on nuclear matters intensified, with both nations recognizing that their exclusion from U.S.-Soviet negotiations gave them a shared interest in developing a European nuclear counterbalance. At the same time, the Soviet

³⁷ CAC, Revised draft of Speech for Financial Times Conference. December, 1972. SOAM/4/2/1. URL: <https://www.historic-newspapers.com/en-gb/pages/old-newspapers/financial-times-archive> (accessed: 16.08.2025).

³⁸ Léman M. Neutrons: the Anti-invasion Weapon for a European defense // *Politique étrangère*. 1981. Vol. 46, № 2. P. 409-425. URL: https://www.persee.fr/doc/polit_0032-342x_1981_num_46_2_3173 (accessed: 04.08.2025). [Les neutrons: l’arme anti-invasion pour une défense européenne].

Union continued to raise the issue of British and French forces, with Brezhnev making clear that future arms control agreements would require their inclusion.

I.3 Euromissile crisis and INF talks

The 1980s saw a rising confrontation between the superpowers, as well as unprecedented collaborative efforts. And although not always the Soviet Union could make the West respect their interests in full, this era brought two major arms control agreements that would shape the arms control regime for almost two decades. At that time, both France and Britain had governments that were interested in maintaining a realistic dialogue with the Soviet Union to the extent that wouldn't harm their interests or weaken their status. Both countries also maintained a close cooperation with the United States, although Britain was more devoted to reinforcing the Atlantic cooperation. Finally, both Paris and London viewed *perestroika* as an opportunity to change the course of the Soviet Union's policy and weaken the military and ideological influence of the Communist regime in the world.

Mitterrand's presidency saw a delicate balancing between maintaining France's strategic autonomy and engaging in arms control efforts. Mitterrand's foreign and defense policy was rooted in the Gaullist tradition, despite his Socialist background. The French President asserted the primacy of the head of state in nuclear deterrence, famously declaring in 1983 that the keystone of France's deterrence strategy was himself as the President. He was also someone whom they call nuclear purists in France, i.e., always emphasizing that nuclear weapons should have an exclusively defensive nature. He criticized the American concept of graduated response, firmly opposed the introduction of a mobile land-based nuclear component, and the neutron bomb during the first period of political cohabitation. Unlike Thatcher, he didn't support the idea of the modernization and broader deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Beyond nuclear strategy, Mitterrand maintained a firm commitment to the development of European defense. He announced the formation of the Rapid Action Force (FAR) in 1983, modeled after the US Rapid Deployment Force, to respond to crises both in Europe and abroad. France played an active role in shaping European security through initiatives like the Conference on Confidence and Security-Building Measures (1984-1986), emphasizing a non-bloc approach to European security.

Unlike De Gaulle, Mitterrand also balanced the Gaullist approach with a more flexible Atlantic policy. While initially reassuring the US of his commitment to Western security, he took a more independent stance from 1982 onward, opposing US economic sanctions on the USSR and continuing gas trade agreements with it. His 1984 visit to the Soviet Union and his advocacy for the European scientific and technological initiative Eureka in 1985 reflected his course to achieve

strategic autonomy. He resisted U.S. pressure on defense matters, notably rejecting integration into NATO's military command even after the end of the Cold War.

Thatcher's diplomacy, in contrast to Mitterrand's, was built on the mission of unprecedentedly strengthening the Atlantic alliance. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, academic experts debated whether global security had become dominated by superpower bilateralism or whether economic and political challenges required broader multilateral engagement. Critics, particularly on the left, argued that American leadership had been weakened by the Vietnam War, Watergate, and economic difficulties, making unquestioned alignment with Washington a flawed approach. Yet, Thatcher's Cold War diplomacy pursued two key objectives: maintaining a unified military and political front to deter Soviet aggression and managing a pragmatic dialogue with the USSR to keep tensions under control. Like her predecessors, she viewed Britain's role in European security as a means of reinforcing US engagement in the continent and countering anti-American and neutralist tendencies both at home and abroad. By aligning closely with the Reagan administration, she aimed to ensure that Britain's voice was influential in Washington and that US power could be leveraged to sustain Britain's position as a global actor. Like her predecessors, she viewed Britain's role in European security as a means of reinforcing US engagement in the continent and countering anti-American and neutralist tendencies both at home and abroad. At the same time, Thatcher's emphasis on sovereignty and skepticism toward European integration contrasted with earlier British strategies that sought a balance between US influence and European engagement.

The SALT-II agreement put limitations on the deployment of intermediate-range cruise missiles over 600 km, but didn't consider IRBMs. Soon after, it began phasing out its older SS-4 and SS-5 intermediate-range missiles in favor of the SS-20, which significantly altered the European security environment. The SS-20 was mobile, highly accurate, and capable of being rapidly redeployed while remaining concealed. Unlike its predecessors, it carried three independently targetable warheads. It had a range of 5,000 kilometers, allowing it to strike targets across Western Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and, from bases in the eastern Soviet Union, much of Asia, Southeast Asia, and Alaska.

In late 1977, NATO's Nuclear Planning Group initiated a study to assess the alliance's long-term modernization needs for INF, aligning with the doctrine of flexible response. By spring 1979, NATO had formed the Special Consultative Group to develop principles for future arms control efforts involving INF. That summer, NATO issued the Integrated Decision Document, outlining the alliance's INF policy, which emphasized a dual approach combining force modernization with arms control efforts.

On November 12, 1979, NATO ministers unanimously endorsed the “dual-track” strategy to counter Soviet SS-20 deployments. One track focused on arms control negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce INF arsenals as much as possible, while the other called for the deployment of 464 U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles and 108 *Pershing II* ballistic missiles in Western Europe, beginning in December 1983. Initially, the Soviet Union refused to engage in discussions unless NATO withdrew its deployment plans. However, by July 1980, the Soviet stance shifted, leading to preliminary talks in Geneva in the fall of that year.

The U.S. approach, shaped through extensive consultations within NATO, required that any INF agreement meet several conditions: it had to ensure equal limits and rights for both superpowers, remain strictly bilateral by excluding British and French nuclear forces, apply restrictions globally, avoid weakening NATO’s conventional defenses, and include effective verification measures. Formal negotiations were agreed upon on September 23, 1981. Shortly after, on November 18, President Reagan introduced the “zero-zero” proposal, offering to eliminate U.S. INF missiles in exchange for the complete dismantling of Soviet SS-20, SS-4, and SS-5 missiles.

The Soviet proposals on British and French nuclear forces during the INF talks were largely centered on linking reductions in Soviet SS-20 missiles to the existence of UK and French nuclear arsenals. Initially, the Soviets proposed maintaining zero US INF systems while retaining enough SS-20s to counterbalance British and French nuclear forces, suggesting reductions in SS-20s from 243 to 178 missiles with 534 warheads. In 1982, the proposed cap of SS-20 was already 162. In October 1985, Gorbachev signaled a shift by proposing a separate track of INF negotiations with the UK and France. However, later in October, the Soviets reverted to their previous stance, insisting that US LRINF missile reductions must be accompanied by equivalent Soviet reductions linked to UK and French arsenals. After the Reykjavik summit, the Soviet insistence on the inclusion of France and Britain started to fade away. In January 1986, Gorbachev proposed the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons over 15 years, with initial INF reductions contingent on British and French commitments not to expand their deterrent forces. The Soviets stopped demanding INF retention as compensation for UK and French forces. In 1987, Gorbachev told Marshal Sokolov in a conversation, “There will be no war with Britain or France. It is not possible. And the mid-range missiles, if we remove them, would change absolutely nothing here.”³⁹ Still, the Soviets sought restrictions on US missile transfers to allies.

³⁹ On Soviet-American Relations and Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Armaments. Politburo 1987. URL: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-02-26%20Politburo.pdf> (accessed: 22.07.2025).

The decision to deploy INF caused different reactions in Europe. On the one hand, it was considered that it would be a more beneficial move in terms of security guarantees. That's why even high French and British officials expressed skepticism towards the Soviet- American talks. Jacques Chirac and Defense Minister André Giraud feared that Soviet disarmament proposals aimed to push the U.S. out of Europe. Giraud strongly opposed both zero-option proposals in 1987, calling them a "European Munich" and warning of Europe's "Finlandization." Margaret Thatcher also once referred to the Soviet Union's proposals for gradually eliminating nuclear weapons in Europe as "salami tactics", which could leave Europe vulnerable to Soviet superiority in chemical and conventional weapons, ultimately enabling the USSR to threaten Europe without facing an adequate response.⁴⁰

On the other side, there were voices that the INF deployment in Europe makes Europeans more vulnerable, as it provides more targets for the Soviet Union on European soil. Moreover, it increased the probability of nuclear escalation, as in the case of conflict, Moscow might be more eager to launch a preventive strike to prevent a strategic threat from Europe. Some experts also argued that the short flight time of the *Pershings* would force them to adopt a policy of "launch-on-warning" rather than waiting to confirm a nuclear attack, and that this would greatly increase the chances of accidental nuclear war.⁴¹

The official positions of Paris and London were also mixed and at times controversial. At the beginning, both Mitterrand and Thatcher voiced their support for NATO's INF deployment.⁴² Both countries however, then supported the INF talks but that wanted these reductions have a limited scale rather than a zero option, as it gave more security guarantees. Both Paris and London ruled out the perspective of Pershing deployments on their soil, considering that it would add targets on their soil for the Soviet Union and make their forces less independent because of the operative control being held by NATO.

That said, when the negotiations started, both countries expressed their support for it, further excluding their own participation. The reasons behind their refusal were quite the same as in SALT: a disproportionate difference compared to the USSR and the US, fears about halting scientific cooperation with the US, and ongoing modernization, independence, or rather, reluctance to become part of the superpowers' command in a bilateral arms control structure. An important thing for Paris and London was that the INF track was going in parallel with the START

⁴⁰ Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher. March, 1987. Moscow // The National Security Archive. URL: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB422/docs/Doc%201%201987-03-30%20Gorbachev-Thatcher%20memcon.pdf> (accessed: 22.07.2025).

⁴¹ Sharp P. Thatcher's diplomacy: the revival of British foreign policy. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. P. 107. URL: <https://archive.org/details/thatchersdiploma0000shar> (accessed: 16.08.2025).

⁴² Montbrial T. de. La politique étrangère de François Mitterrand // Thierry de Montbrial. 1995. URL: <https://thierrydemontbrial.com/la-politique-etrangere-de-francois-mitterrand/> (accessed: 16.08.2025).

talks, promising overall reductions of both the US and Soviet arsenal. However, a changed geopolitical landscape added some other arguments to their non-participation: namely, the Soviet supremacy in other WMD, such as chemical weapons, as well as the argument around whether the *Pershings* located in Germany should be included in the talks, which both countries viewed as a dangerous precedent of an inclusion of a European power in the talks.

British involvement in the talks during the 1980s was much bigger than during the previous years. Partly, this is explained by the fact that the talks dealt with systems in Europe and were tied to the broader discussions on the future of European security, although at the same time, France didn't show much involvement in the talks. Another part of it was good personal relations between Thatcher and Reagan, and Thatcher and Gorbachev, which London used as a means to exert its own limited influence in the world.

Thirdly, the UK's problem with the German Pershing missiles in the INF Treaty negotiations stemmed from concerns about precedent and broader NATO nuclear strategy. Although the missiles were controlled by the US, their presence in West Germany symbolically gave the FRG a potential nuclear role, which complicated arms control discussions. Britain feared that including them in INF would set a precedent that could pressure the UK to involve its own nuclear forces in future negotiations. The USSR pushed for its inclusion in the INF, but the US, UK, and France resisted, arguing that they were third-country systems. Mitterand, on the opposite, backed "nor *Pershing*, nor SS-20" proposal by the USSR, including the *Pershings* in Germany, which was also a result of his Paris ambition to stay ahead of FRG politically.

Thatcher's concerns about NATO's nuclear strategy and Germany's role in arms control negotiations reflected deeper Anglo-German tensions over the future of European security. While Britain was primarily focused on maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent and resisting any pressure to include its own arsenal in disarmament talks, West Germany was increasingly eager to pursue arms reduction initiatives to satisfy domestic political pressures. This divergence was evident in the INF Treaty process, where the removal of German Pershing missiles was seen by Britain as both a necessary step to avoid setting a precedent and a potential weakening of NATO's nuclear posture.

As debates over nuclear modernization intensified, Thatcher found herself increasingly at odds not only with West Germany but also with shifting American priorities. While she insisted on NATO's commitment to modernizing short-range nuclear systems, the political climate within NATO was moving in the opposite direction. Kohl's government, facing strong public opposition to nuclear weapons, pushed for negotiations on further reductions, warning that failing to act could lead to a more radical German leadership position. Meanwhile, the United States, under President

Bush, gradually softened its stance, moving away from the doctrine of “flexible response” toward a vision of nuclear weapons as a “last resort.”

By 1990, Thatcher’s influence on nuclear policy was visibly waning. NATO’s evolving position aligned more closely with German preferences, and American support for British efforts to modernize nuclear systems faded. The final blow came when Bush’s administration signaled a fundamental shift in nuclear doctrine, prioritizing conventional forces and embracing reductions in tactical nuclear weapons. For Thatcher, this marked not only a defeat in her efforts to uphold Britain’s vision of NATO’s deterrence strategy but also a broader failure to shape the post-Cold War security order in a way that preserved Britain’s traditional influence within the alliance.

The eventual compromise in the INF marked a weakening of NATO’s nuclear deterrent in Europe for the UK, which is why it pushed for modernizing other weapons to maintain a strong NATO defense posture.

The Gulf War and the discovery of an Iraqi WMD program brought another argument into British-Soviet arms control discussions. The Soviet superiority in other WMD weapons, such as chemical and biological ones, was raised as one of the British concerns. Margaret Thatcher raised this issue several times when talking about British non-participation in the talks. It was also referred to in the debate in the House of Commons⁴³. However, this argument was not about the fears of the USSR attacking the UK with chemical weapons, but instead spoke to the general Soviet Union superiority in the case of a war in Europe. It was also an attempt from Britain to keep a finger on the pulse and in some way influence the Soviet-American talks on the ban of chemical and nuclear weapons.

British concerns over nuclear cooperation and the replacement of *Trident* missiles persisted throughout the 1980s, leading to new developments. The UK had an agreement with the United States to replace *Trident I* missiles with the more advanced *Trident II* (D5) missiles. *Trident II* missiles offered superior capabilities, including increased range (up to 7,500 miles) and improved accuracy.

However, the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START-I) between the United States and the Soviet Union raised concerns in the UK about the future of the US commitments. The Soviet Union’s insistence on including Trident missiles in the START I negotiations and potentially limiting US assistance in modernization efforts added to these worries.

Mitterand’s goals towards the US-Soviet talks were practically the same as the British ones: to reduce the Soviet nuclear arsenal in Europe without compromising French nuclear arsenal

⁴³ Defence - Hansard - UK Parliament - European Fighter Aircraft, 1987. URL: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1987-12-08/debates/bffc5628-9dbc-4538-b369-06281fbb8524/Defence> (accessed: 11.08.2025).

development, nuclear war plans, and the number of warheads. He once told in an interview that French submarines are not “intermediary” to participate in the INF: “The consequence of this Soviet request, which I rejected, is that if our submarine missiles, which can currently travel 3,500 kilometers, 4,000 kilometers, were taken into account in the discussion of intermediate forces – which they are not – we would witness this strange spectacle that I have already noted: two foreign countries which would have our own armament, this submarine armament, while they are not discussing their submarines in this negotiation.”⁴⁴ But the fact was that both France and the UK also mentioned that they wouldn’t consider participating in the START talks.

Because of the strong anti-nuclear movement, both countries had diverging views on the different aspects of the talks, which sometimes created contradictions with what was said by the British Prime Minister or the French President. These concerns continued throughout the whole negotiation period. The British Parliament questioned whether the US would be ready to uphold its commitments on the modernization of *Trident*. In March 1982, President Reagan confirmed in a letter to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that “the United States Government is prepared to supply to the United Kingdom *Trident II* missiles, equipment and supporting services”⁴⁵, which was a response to Thatcher’s earlier request for guarantees. However, this issue continued to be raised until 1986.

The French political and military establishment’s support of the Treaty was neither complete nor unanimous in its voices. Jean-Bernard Raimond, the French Foreign Minister, stated in an interview with *Die Zeit* on April 22 that France was supportive of the treaty but remained cautious about the broader disarmament agenda, highlighting concerns that once U.S. and Soviet INF weapons were eliminated, pressure might increase to include British and French nuclear forces in future negotiations.

Chirac, in his speech in Washington on March 31, 1987, voiced fair concerns that removing U.S. *Pershing II* and cruise missiles from Europe would weaken the link between U.S. and European security. François Fillon, chairman of the National Defense Commission, echoed these concerns, arguing that the Reykjavik Summit had nearly led to an agreement that could have dangerously weakened European defense. French Minister of Research and Industry from 1981 to 1983, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, took an even more critical stance, warning that if U.S. nuclear forces in Europe were withdrawn too hastily, France could find itself increasingly isolated as the

⁴⁴ Television interview with Mr. François Mitterrand, President of the Republic, granted to Antenne 2 during the program “The hour of truth”, on defense policy, European security and foreign policy of France, Paris, 1983. URL: <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-5788-fr.pdf> (accessed: 16.08.2025). [Entretien télévisé de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, accordé à Antenne 2 lors de l’émission “L’heure de vérité”, sur la politique de défense, la sécurité européenne et la politique étrangère de la France]

⁴⁵ Letter to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom on the Sale of the Trident II Missile System // The American Presidency Project. URL: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/letter-prime-minister-margaret-thatcher-the-united-kingdom-the-sale-the-trident-ii-missile> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

sole continental nuclear power within NATO. He also argued that INF negotiations should be accompanied by discussions on conventional and chemical disarmament.

The debate over INF did not subside even as negotiations neared their conclusion. As late as April 1987, key French political figures continued to express reservations about the treaty's implications. Former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing questioned whether the presence of Pershing missiles in Germany was truly necessary for securing the U.S. commitment to European defense.

The diverging positions on talks inside the governments, as well as uncertainty on how the talks would influence the security situation in Europe and influence the credibility of their own deterrents, made France and the UK align once again over both nuclear cooperation and European defense.

Then French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac proposed increased bilateral consultations between French and British defense officials to discuss the implications of the INF Treaty and broader European security matters. While the U.S. and the Soviet Union dominated arms control negotiations, France and the United Kingdom sought to maintain their influence by presenting a unified stance on key strategic concerns. By 1989, London and Paris had reportedly come to see their doctrinal differences as less significant than previously thought.

In the late 1980s, France and the United Kingdom seriously explored the joint acquisition of a tactical nuclear air-to-surface missile (TASM), with the initial political drive believed to have come from London.

Furthermore, the US-Soviet rapprochement revived the French-British nuclear cooperation, although it was again mainly reduced to information exchange. As BASIC 2012 research shows, during a visit to Faslane in 1986, shortly before the Reykjavik Summit, French Defense Minister André Giraud reiterated France's offer to sell the M4 missile. When UK Defense Secretary George Younger visited the Île Longue base in March 1987, the two sides discussed broader nuclear cooperation, leading to an agreement to enhance the exchange of nuclear-related information. Reports indicate that by late 1987, Paris had even proposed discussions on nuclear targeting coordination. In January 1988, a bilateral agreement between the defense ministers included provisions for French SSBNs to make port calls in the UK.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the experience of U.S.-Soviet negotiations. First, arms control negotiations were viewed differently by Britain and France. On the one hand, overall reductions were seen as a positive step. On the other hand, both the SALT and INF talks were perceived as part of a broader trend in which superpowers dictated major international security

decisions. The most concerning aspect of this was that, at times, the U.S. and the USSR, preoccupied with their own global interests, left European deterrence issues unregulated. This led to an expansion of tactical nuclear arsenals, creating a dangerous situation with INF missiles.

Furthermore, Britain and France feared that participation in the negotiations would require aligning their military planning with U.S. strategic objectives, making their arsenals more dependent on American decisions. Their primary concern was that, amid superpower rivalry, their national interests would be overlooked.

During the SALT I talks, British and French nuclear forces were still developing and did not pose a significant threat. However, over time, Soviet concerns became more justified and were eventually acknowledged by the U.S. The rapid increase in warhead numbers, improved accuracy of strategic delivery systems, and future military plans targeting the USSR all posed real threats, ones that the Soviet Union had no effective means to counter.

At the same time, within the bipolar structure, the USSR had limited influence over Britain and France. Aware of this challenge, the Soviet Union attempted to use the issue as a bargaining chip in negotiations, trading it for concessions beneficial to them in the SALT and INF talks. For example, during the SALT discussions, Moscow successfully excluded the Backfire bomber from the agreement. Additionally, the USSR promoted the “zero-option proposal” and leveraged British and French support to pressure the U.S. into accepting it. Notably, in both cases, after the major terms of the agreements were settled with U.S. leaders (in Vladivostok for SALT and Reykjavik for INF), the Soviet Union largely refrained from raising the issue in subsequent negotiations. As the head of the Soviet delegation at the START I talks, Mr. Yuri Nazarkine, told the author, after the failure to include this issue in the SALT agenda, the Soviet Union concluded that it would not be possible to involve Britain and France in the negotiations, but their arsenals were always considered by the Soviet military when calculating potential overall arms ceilings with the United States.⁴⁶ This approach was later confirmed during the Russian Parliament’s discussion of START I ratification, when General Gromov, in response to a question, stated that British and French forces were indeed taken into account.⁴⁷

These negotiations had a lasting impact, deepening Franco-British cooperation in the military nuclear field and laying the foundation for further developments. They also sparked discussions about strengthening European defense and enhancing U.S. security guarantees.

⁴⁶ Interview by the author with Yuri Nazarkine. May, 2025.

⁴⁷ Nazarkine Y. On START. On Africa. On Life. Memoirs of a Diplomat / Foreword by V.A. Orlov. PIR Center. Moscow: Ves Mir Publishers, 2024. P. 257. URL: <https://pircenter.org/memuary-jurija-nazarkina-ob-snv-ob-afrike-o-zhizni-vospominaniya-diplomata/> (accessed: 06.08.2025). [Мемуары Юрия Назаркина «Об СНВ. Об Африке. О жизни. Воспоминания дипломата»].

However, progress was limited by Europe's lack of resources on one hand and the U.S. reluctance to extend additional commitments on the other.

Ultimately, the non-inclusion of British and French forces in these agreements served as a "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement" (BATNA) for all parties. For the Soviet Union, it meant avoiding restrictions on its tactical nuclear forces. For Britain and France, it preserved their strategic independence. For the U.S., it ensured that two NATO allies retained nuclear capabilities. However, leaving the issue unresolved also weakened the Soviet argument for the urgency of inclusion in future negotiations.

CHAPTER II. ARMS CONTROL IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE MULTILATERALIZATION OF STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

Strategic deterrence in the 21st century is characterized by both continuity and transformation. On one hand, the primary nuclear deterrence between the United States and Russia remains central in the goal of preventing nuclear war, as they continue to possess the largest nuclear arsenals. This rivalry has persisted into the 21st century, fueled by NATO expansion, the increasing confrontation between Russia and the West following the war in Georgia, the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, and culminating in the war in Ukraine in 2022. Despite frequent Western narratives predicting Russia's geopolitical decline, the past decade has demonstrated that the deterioration of U.S.-Russia cooperation catalyzes structural shifts in global politics and economics, disrupts economic stability, and exacerbates regional instabilities. Much like during the Cold War, uncoordinated security policies between these powers have underscored the renewed importance of strategic deterrence. The conflicts in Georgia and Crimea further eroded Russia-West relations, making deterrence even more relevant.

At the same time, nuclear deterrence has undergone profound and complex transformations in the 21st century. The erosion of unipolarity, marked by the relative decline of U.S. dominance, has enabled regional powers to assert themselves with greater political, economic, and military autonomy. This shift has created new dynamics in international security, with emerging powers gaining access to advanced technologies and expanding their strategic influence. Concurrently, the globalization of markets and the acceleration of economic liberalization have weakened the capacity of both national governments and supranational institutions to regulate the spread of critical technologies and to exert control over transnational threats. Besides, reductions in strategic arsenals and rising confrontation between the West and Russia, as well as the West and China, have made multilateral arms control and risk reduction more relevant. As Russian scholar Konstantin Bogdanov argues, deep reductions in central nuclear arsenals, primarily between the United States and Russia, have lowered the risk of global nuclear war but shifted the focus toward peripheral issues of strategic stability, such as the escalation of regional conflicts to the nuclear level, catastrophic terrorism, and challenges to non-proliferation.⁴⁸ This shift has exposed the need for a new conceptual and analytical framework to address emerging risks.

The conflict in Ukraine has illustrated that regional wars can still serve as proxies for great power competition. However, unlike in the Cold War era, these conflicts now carry a heightened

⁴⁸ Bogdanov K. Strategic Stability: Dynamics and Factors of Transformation. // Moscow University Bulletin. Series 25: International Relations and World Politics. Vol. 14, № 4. P. 7-47. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/strategicheskaya-stabilnost-dinamika-i-factory-transformatsii> (accessed: 04.08.2025). [Стратегическая стабильность: динамика и факторы трансформации].

risk of rapid and unpredictable escalation. The integration of hypersonic weapons, cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, and other disruptive technologies has blurred the line between conventional and strategic domains, inflicting more disruptive damage on both civilian and military infrastructures.

Furthermore, the deployment of new types of dual-use conventional capabilities, particularly long-range precision-guided missiles with substantial explosive yields, has further complicated deterrence calculations. Lieber and Press (2017) suggest that this increased precision poses a threat to the survivability of nuclear arsenals by enabling potential disarming strikes using advanced conventional munitions.⁴⁹ Scholar Tom Sauer (2024) argues that these weapons possess deterrent characteristics similar to nuclear arms.⁵⁰ Furthermore, these systems can be mistaken for nuclear assets or trigger disproportionate responses due to their strategic impact. For example, Russian nuclear doctrine suggests that a large-scale conventional strike, such as one carried out by British or French long-range intermediate nuclear force (LRINF) missiles, could potentially provoke a nuclear response. Critically, the lack of clarity surrounding the attribution of responsibility for such actions, whether the retaliatory strike would target the state that launched the weapons or the one that authorized their use, adds another layer of strategic uncertainty. This ambiguity increases the likelihood of inadvertent escalation and makes the prospect of nuclear escalation among the United Kingdom, France, and Russia more conceivable than in previous decades.

The shift in nuclear deterrence has also been shaped by the redistribution of global military power. While the U.S. and Russia have reduced their nuclear arsenals in compliance with arms control agreements, the disproportion in the numbers of warheads with France and the UK (despite their own reductions) has shrunk. Since reaching the New START ceilings in 2018, Russia has repeatedly called for a transition from bilateral to multilateral arms control, arguing that the era of exclusive U.S.-Russia agreements has passed and highlighting the need to adapt arms control to the realities of a multipolar world.

Thus, the war in Ukraine has reinforced and made several aspects of modern strategic deterrence more distinct. First, it has reaffirmed the significance of deterrence at the regional level between Russia and the West in the context of a proxy war. Second, it has reignited discussions on the evolving nature of deterrence, as Western nations reconsider their security postures. Third, the consolidation of the global West against Russia, including increased involvement from France and the United Kingdom, coupled with the increased significance of conventional weapons, has

⁴⁹ Lieber K, Press D. The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence. *International Security*, 2017. URL: https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00273 (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁵⁰ Sauer T. How Useful are Nuclear Weapons in Practice? Case-Study: The War in Ukraine // *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*. Pp. 194-210. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2024.2359818> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

underscored that strategic deterrence is no longer a strictly U.S.-Russia matter but now encompasses NATO as a whole.

In Western discourse, the prospects of multilateral control are primarily seen as involving China. From the US perspective, the increased significance of the Asia Pacific region, coupled with China's military expansion, made the issue of Chinese engagement in nuclear arms control talks even more relevant. A central concern for the United States is the scale and pace of China's military expansion. In 2021, the Pentagon confirmed that China's navy had become the largest in the world in terms of ship numbers, surpassing the U.S. fleet⁵¹. Although the United States still maintains superior technological and power-projection capabilities, the numerical growth of China's naval forces reflects a long-term strategic intent to dominate regional waters and challenge U.S. naval supremacy in the Western Pacific. More alarming for U.S. defense planners, however, is China's transformation of its nuclear posture. The yearly U.S. Department of Defense reports on China's military power note significant advances in all three legs of China's nuclear triad, including the development of new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), nuclear-capable bombers, and the construction of at least three large-scale missile silo fields in western China⁵². According to U.S. estimates, China's nuclear warhead stockpile, which numbered around 400 in 2021, could grow to 1,500 warheads by 2035 if current trends continue. This projection represents not only a substantial quantitative leap but also a qualitative shift in Chinese strategic intentions, suggesting a move away from a minimal deterrence posture to one that may approach parity with the United States and Russia.

Unlike the US and Russia, China was never a party to the INF Treaty and has used this freedom to develop and deploy a robust arsenal of intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles, many of which are capable of targeting U.S. bases and allied territories throughout Asia. These developments have triggered anxiety among U.S. allies such as Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, who fear the growing vulnerability of their security environments. In response, the United States has redeployed dual-use missile systems to the region, including basing intermediate-range capabilities in the Philippines, and is considering reviving or replacing elements of its own INF-range forces⁵³.

In this context, the United States is increasingly confronted with what has been termed the "two-peer" dilemma, the challenge of simultaneously deterring two nuclear-armed great powers:

⁵¹ Department of Defense. Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2021. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF> (accessed: 23.07.2025).

⁵² Department of Defense. Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2023. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLE'S-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF> (accessed: 20.07.2025).

⁵³ Kristensen H, Korda M., Reynolds E. Russian nuclear weapons, 2023. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00963402.2023.2202542> (accessed: 22.07.2025).

Russia and China. Against this backdrop, Russia's long-standing argument regarding the need to account for the combined nuclear forces of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom in any strategic balance takes on renewed significance. While France and the UK are formal allies of the U.S. under NATO, China and Russia maintain no mutual defense commitments. However, geographic realities and shifting strategic calculations could blur this distinction. For instance, in the event of a nuclear conflict involving China, missile trajectories over the Arctic region could bring Russian early-warning systems into play, raising the risk of inadvertent escalation or Russian intervention.

Therefore, if the United States were to pursue a trilateral arms control framework that includes both China and Russia, it could be perceived particularly by Moscow as tacit acknowledgment of the concept of "concerted deterrence" (where the necessity to deter two or more actors, which are political allies and might coordinate their efforts to deter an adversary, entails their both involvement in arms control). In response, Russia demands the inclusion of the British and French arsenals in future arms control talks, insisting that its own security concerns *vis-à-vis* NATO's nuclear dimension would need to be addressed.

When it comes to the European interests, there are compelling reasons why Europe might be willing to participate in dialogue, both regionally and globally. First, the progressive collapse of key arms control agreements that directly affected European security has significantly increased the continent's vulnerability. The demise of the INF Treaty removed critical constraints on ground-launched nuclear-capable missiles in Europe. The U.S. and Russia's withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty, which had allowed mutual aerial surveillance, eroded confidence-building frameworks. Institutions that once anchored East-West dialogue, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), have been hollowed out in terms of diplomatic value, particularly in the wake of the war in Ukraine. With no viable multilateral mechanism remaining, the space for structured dialogue has vanished at Europe's expense.

Second, the war in Ukraine and the growing militarization of NATO's eastern flank, Russia's development and deployment of dual-use systems with regional ranges, and the increasing significance of tactical nuclear weapons turned Eastern Europe into a region of heightened strategic instability. The absence of arms control regulations and transparency measures in the region leaves significant room for further militarization. This is already evident in developments such as the stationing of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus, as well as growing calls within Poland for the potential deployment of French nuclear weapons.

Third, over the last 20 years, a growing pattern of strategic divergence has emerged between the U.S. and its European allies under Republican administrations. President Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), despite European

opposition, and the current exclusion of the EU from Ukraine-related negotiations, underscore the limits of Europe's influence in security matters when decisions are made primarily in Washington. As Heather Williams, Director at CSIS, has argued, Europe should develop its own proactive and independent approach to arms control; otherwise, it risks being sidelined in future negotiations that affect its security the most.⁵⁴ In this context, President Emmanuel Macron's past observation that one of the significant weaknesses of the INF Treaty was the absence of European voices becomes particularly relevant. If Europe does not assert itself, there is a risk that technological developments and the US interests will continue to dictate the security landscape. The transformation of the global security landscape has made strategic stability more complex and comprehensive. The weakening of the bipolar structure, the rise of regional powers, and the increasing integration of conventional and nuclear deterrence have reshaped the strategic environment. Current ruptures in the European arms control regime offer an opportunity to develop new approaches to modern threats.

II.1 Discussions on the offset of French and British nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War Era

The United States and Russia entered the era of multipolarity while still operating within a traditional, bipolar arms control framework exemplified by the SORT and New START agreements signed in 2002 and 2010. Notably, during the early 2000s, Russia did not actively raise concerns about the British and French nuclear arsenals. One plausible explanation for this restraint is that both France and the United Kingdom were pursuing significant unilateral reductions of their nuclear forces and were acting relatively independently on matters of international security and nonproliferation. For instance, France was not part of NATO Nuclear Planning Group and played a prominent, autonomous role in negotiations with Iran, signaling a degree of separation from U.S. foreign policy.

Furthermore, NATO's collective posture was not necessarily perceived by Russia as an immediate or existential threat in the early post-Cold War period. Even after the significant 2004 "Big Bang" enlargement, which brought seven new members into the Alliance, including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, Russia did not raise NATO's nuclear dimension as an issue during the 2005 NPT Review Conference. This suggests that NATO's expansion, while politically sensitive, was not yet interpreted through a strategic nuclear lens. As Russian scholar Alexander Savelyev has argued, deterrence is ultimately a matter of

⁵⁴ Williams H. Russian Inconsistency on Arms Control Is an Opportunity for Europe // Nuclear Network, 2025. URL: <https://nuclearnetwork.csis.org/russian-inconsistency-on-arms-control-is-an-opportunity-for-europe/> (accessed: 11.08.2025).

perception and becomes operative when two actors mutually perceive one another as adversaries.⁵⁵ At the time, such a perception had not yet fully crystallized in Moscow's view of NATO.

This period marked a “reset” in U.S.-Russian negotiations as both countries sought to improve relations following the war in Georgia and the impending expiration of the SORT treaty. As Rose Gottemoller noted in a commentary to the author, given the time constraints, Russia refrained from raising the issue of British and French nuclear arsenals during the talks.

By 2018, when the ceilings under New START were achieved, Russia began to raise the issue of the need for multilateral arms control with the UK and France within the Disarmament Commission. In 2018, a Russian statement said that “Russia, among other things, has been consistently calling for the earliest launch of a multilateral dialogue engaging all states without exception of those that possess military nuclear potential.”⁵⁶ In 2019, Russia added that “the principles of consensus, equality, and mutual consideration of interests of all countries should serve as a foundation for a future multilateral process”⁵⁷.

After the start of the war in Ukraine and the suspension of the New START in 2023, Russia has increasingly advocated for the inclusion of the United Kingdom and France in future nuclear arms control negotiations. Russian officials argued that the evolving security landscape and the nuclear capabilities of these NATO allies necessitate their participation in any comprehensive arms control framework.

In December 2023, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna, emphasized that France and the UK must be part of the discussions to replace New START upon its expiration in 2026. He highlighted that, despite their smaller arsenals compared to those of the U.S. and Russia, the nuclear forces of France and the UK are significant and sensitive to Russia's security, especially given their close coordination with the United States within NATO.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Savelyev, A.G. Strategic Stability and Nuclear Deterrence: Lessons from History // Moscow University Bulletin. Series 25: International Relations and World Politics, 2015. No. 3. Pp. 57-84. [Стратегическая стабильность и ядерное сдерживание: уроки истории].

⁵⁶ Statement by H.E. Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov, Head of the Russian Delegation, Director of Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Department of the MFA of Russia at First Committee of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly on Nuclear Weapons Cluster. 2017. P. 3. URL: https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com17/statements/16Oct_Russia.pdf (accessed: 18.07.2025).

⁵⁷ Statement by Mr. Vladimir Yermakov, Director of the Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Head of Delegation of the Russian Federation to the First Committee of the 74 UNGA session within the General Debate. URL: https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com19/statements/11Oct_Russia.pdf (accessed: 11.08.2025).

⁵⁸ Russia Calls for Inclusion of France and UK in Talks with US on Future Nuclear Weapons Treaty to Replace START III in 2026. World Today News. December, 2023. URL: <https://www.world-today-news.com/russia-calls-for-inclusion-of-france-and-uk-in-talks-with-us-on-future-nuclear-weapons-treaty-to-replace-start-iii-in-2026/> (accessed: 11.08.2025).

In Moscow's assessment, after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine, the resulting solidarity of NATO, now openly self-identified as a nuclear alliance and recently enlarged by Sweden and Finland, has rendered Western threats far more immediate. Britain and France have played leading roles in that effort, not only by supplying Kyiv with long-range conventional missiles but by introducing an explicit nuclear dimension: London and Paris both placed their submarine-launched deterrent forces on heightened alert, and they facilitated Ukrainian strikes into Russian territory. These steps prompted Russia to revise its military doctrine to warn that a conventional attack on its homeland could elicit a nuclear response. Moscow's own swift flight tests of advanced systems, such as the *Oreshnik*, underscore its conviction that arms control must extend beyond intercontinental weapons to include dual-capable, European-range systems, and that such deployments should be kept well away from Russia's borders. Kremlin spokesmen like Dmitry Peskov have condemned French- and German-led discussions of a new "European deterrent" as "highly dangerous."⁵⁹ Following Russia's advance in northeastern Ukraine, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom moved to lift restrictions on the range of certain weapons systems, a decision strongly criticized by the Kremlin, which warned that such actions could undermine ongoing diplomatic efforts regarding Ukraine.⁶⁰

While this type of signaling may offer short-term tactical advantages by influencing either the battlefield or the negotiating table, Europe has far more to gain through a broader strategic approach. By articulating a coherent vision for conflict resolution, sustained dialogue, and a renewed framework for European security, European nations could significantly enhance their political influence and credibility in shaping the outcome of the crisis. In the current vacuum of European arms-control regimes and amid the ongoing instability in Eastern Europe, Russia may now be open to negotiating limits not only on strategic arsenals but also on theatre- and intermediate-range forces in Europe. Any meaningful dialogue, however, would have to involve Britain, France, and Germany as the principal Western stakeholders in those capabilities.

II.2 France and the UK's Perspectives on Arms Control with Russia after the Start of the War in Ukraine

France and the United Kingdom share a core interest in preventing nuclear conflict in Europe, which underpins their approach to arms control. Their priorities span several key areas: restoring agreements and mechanisms that would enhance transparency and predictability around

⁵⁹ Macron's remarks on nuclear umbrella highly dangerous Kremlin // TASS. March, 2025. URL: <https://tass.com/politics/1932745> (accessed: 25.08.2025).

⁶⁰ Kremlin criticizes move by Ukraine's allies to lift ban on firing long-range missiles at Russia // CNN. URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/27/europe/germany-ukraine-russia-long-range-missile-intl-hnk> (accessed: 05.08.2025).

nuclear weapon systems, protecting Europe from nuclear and dual-use systems capable of striking within European range, reducing the risk of use of tactical nuclear weapons, and reducing uncertainties related to dual-use systems.

II.2.1 Declaratory Policy and Unilateral Reductions after the Cold War

It seems that neither the United Kingdom nor France has ever delivered an official, public response specifically addressing Russia's calls to include the UK and France in a multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, although at the conferences or in private conversations, both British and French officials recognized the potential involvement in arms control talks. It always stressed independent operational control over its nuclear arsenal, although it acknowledged that "UK's deterrent provides an important contribution to Euro-Atlantic security." In one of the British Parliamentary debates, it was also stated that "possession of these weapons is solely political" and that "submarines on patrol are at several days" notice to fire, and since 1994 we have not targeted our missiles on any state.⁶¹ At the same time, as one British diplomat noted in a comment to the author, the UK acknowledges that it will eventually need to join multilateral nuclear negotiations, and this recognition was one of the motivations behind launching nuclear verification initiatives.⁶²

He also made it clear that neither the UK, the US, nor France would agree to be counted under the same ceilings, and that the P5 would probably be the best venue for the UK to hold arms control dialogue.

Since the end of the Cold War, both countries have shown a good record of unilateral disarmament. France reassessed its nuclear arsenal after the end of the Cold War. One of the most consequential changes came in 1996, when France's land-based nuclear missiles, *Plateau d'Albion*, were decommissioned and destroyed. This marked the end of the land-based leg of France's nuclear triad and reflected a broader shift away from Cold War-era force postures.

Alongside this, France reduced the overall size of its nuclear arsenal. The air-based component, once composed of multiple squadrons of *Mirage* aircraft, was streamlined and eventually equipped with dual-capable *Rafale* fighters carrying *ASMP-A* cruise missiles. At sea, the older *Redoutable*-class submarines were phased out in favor of the more advanced *Triomphant*-class SSBNs, which were armed with modern SLBMs. Since the end of the Cold War, France has reduced its nuclear arsenal from around 540-600 warheads to approximately 290, cutting it by nearly half.

⁶¹ Nuclear Weapons (International Relations Committee Report) - Motion to Take Note // They Work for You. URL: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2019-07-16a.174.3&s=nuclear+arms+control> (accessed: 07.08.2025).

⁶² Interview by the author. May 8, 2025.

Britain also significantly reduced its nuclear arsenal. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, successive UK governments cut the number of operational warheads, decommissioned the WE.177 gravity bombs, and reduced the number of deployed Trident missiles on each submarine. By the mid-2010s, the UK had reduced its stockpile to around 180 warheads, with a commitment to further reduce this to no more than 180 by the mid-2020s. However, this disarmament trend reversed in 2021 when the UK announced a new ceiling of up to 260 warheads, citing a deteriorating global security environment, the resurgence of great power competition, and emerging technological threats.⁶³

The British before 2022 showed little willingness to engage in any multilateral negotiation. At the beginning of the century, the British argument was “that the framework for multilateral disarmament is not yet sufficiently mature,” and that unilateral reductions would be a more viable option.⁶⁴ For the UK, a precondition for such engagement would be the resolution of destabilizing factors in Europe, particularly by establishing conventional arms control as a foundation for broader nuclear arms control. He also emphasized that while significant nuclear reductions are unlikely from either the UK or France, there are alternative approaches to arms control. These measures might include setting overall warhead ceilings, refraining from developing certain categories of weapons, regulating the deployment of weapon systems, and embracing the concept of irreversibility, all aimed at preventing further growth in stockpiles. He added that reviving an agreement similar to the INF Treaty would also be beneficial. France also didn’t express much interest in multilateral arms control, except from some statements from the first Macron’s presidency. In the aftermath of the United States’ withdrawal from the INF Treaty in August 2019, when President Putin proposed a global moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles, the French President emphasized the importance of not dismissing the proposal outright and advocated for engaging in dialogue with Russia on arms control matters. In 2020, President Macron declared that “following the collapse of the INF Treaty, France wishes to see broader discussions start, in which Europe must have its voice heard and ensure that its interests will be taken into consideration in negotiations for a new instrument that could ensure strategic stability on our continent. Let’s be clear, if a negotiation and a wider treaty are possible, we would support them. If some block them, we won’t stay idle. And the Europeans must be a part of, and signatories to, the next treaty, for what is at stake is our territory and a discussion that cannot take place above

⁶³ Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy // GOV.UK, 2021. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁶⁴ The UK’s Independent Strategic Nuclear Deterrent and the White Paper. 2025. URL: <https://www.rusi.orghttps://www.rusi.org> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

ourselves.”⁶⁵ However, this statement was made only by the President and wasn’t supported by any further statements from the Defense Minister or the General of the Armed Forces. Moreover, over the past year, France has repeatedly advocated for the Europeanization of nuclear deterrence. It has emerged as one of the most enthusiastic proponents of boosting European investments in strategic conventional capabilities. Various proposals have been put forward regarding what a European deterrent might look like. These include the potential deployment of French nuclear weapons either temporarily or permanently in the Baltic states, increased nuclear cooperation with Germany, and joint development of dual-use delivery systems with other European partners.

These ideas have recently gained some traction. Certain Baltic states have expressed support for forward deployment of French forces, Germany’s new chancellor has publicly endorsed the broader concept of a European deterrent, and France, Germany, and Poland have agreed to collaborate on the development of a long-range missile system, which could potentially have dual-use applications.⁶⁶

While it remains unclear how far these declarations and initiatives will progress in practice, they nonetheless signal a growing trend: the pursuit of greater strategic leverage for Europe in the case of a potential conflict.

In summary, at the declaratory level, both France and the UK currently show limited willingness to engage in arms control. However, certain voiced concerns and policy positions suggest that some underlying interest in specific areas of arms control persists. At the sub-strategic level, there appears to be interest in reducing the salience of tactical nuclear weapons and curbing the proliferation of dual-use capabilities. While neither country has indicated support for strategic arms control at this stage, several factors could influence French and British approaches towards arms control. These include the need for nuclear risk reduction, potential frameworks for arms control involving China, and the possibility of enhanced nuclear cooperation among the UK, France, and the United States.

II.2.2 French and British Concerns in Arms Control

Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Rising Salience and Mitigation Options

⁶⁵ Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy // Élysée. 7 February, 2020. URL: <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy> (accessed: 01.08.2025).

⁶⁶ Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy // Elysee.fr, 2020. URL: <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy> (accessed: 05.08.2025).

Russia's special military operation in Ukraine reignited global discussions around the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs), particularly due to their perceived advantages, limited destructive radius, and high precision. Speculation emerged that such options were being considered within Russia's military leadership. A former U.S. Department of Defense official speaking at the 2025 Carnegie Nuclear Conference noted that in 2022, certain shifts in Russian nuclear posture led the CIA to revise its estimated probability of Russian nuclear use from 2% to as high as 50%. The debate surrounding TNWs has intensified significantly in both Russia and the West. It has renewed focus on the strategic utility of these weapons and their possible role in regional conflicts, contributing to broader discussions on escalation dynamics and the evolving nature of deterrence in 21st-century warfare.

Despite widespread international speculation and media rumors suggesting that Russia might consider the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the context of the war in Ukraine, Russian leadership has consistently and repeatedly denied such intentions at the official level.

President Vladimir Putin has articulated Russia's nuclear posture on multiple occasions, emphasizing that the country adheres to a doctrine of retaliatory use, specifically a reciprocal counterstrike only in response to a confirmed attack on Russian territory. Since the beginning of the special military operation, President Putin's public statements have remained within this long-standing strategic logic. In September 2022, while announcing partial mobilization, he reiterated that Russia would use all available means to defend its territorial integrity, but without deviating from its established nuclear policy.

Russia's Minister of Defense, Sergey Shoigu, has explicitly declared that there is no military necessity to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine to achieve Russian objectives.⁶⁷ Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov strongly rejected the concept of "limited nuclear war," reaffirming Russia's commitment to the principle that nuclear war must never be fought or won, a view Russia publicly shared with the U.S. and other P5 states in joint declarations⁶⁸.

This consistent message has also been conveyed at the international level. In October 2022, during a UN First Committee session, Russian diplomat Konstantin Vorontsov reaffirmed that Russia fully adheres to its obligations under the Budapest Memorandum, which includes a commitment not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states like

⁶⁷ Shoigu: Russia Has No Need to Use Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine to Achieve Its Objectives. Interfax. August, 2022. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/856813> (accessed: 02.08.2025). [Шойгу заявил, что Россия не планирует применять на Украине ядерное или химическое оружие].

⁶⁸ Interview of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.A. Ryabkov with the journal International Affairs // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation website. September, 2022. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1829905/> (accessed: 01.08.2025). [Интервью заместителя Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.А.Рябкова журналу «Международная жизнь»].

Ukraine.⁶⁹ In a May 2025 interview, President Vladimir Putin stated that the need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine has not arisen and expressed hope it will remain unnecessary, emphasizing Russia's capacity to resolve the conflict without nuclear escalation.⁷⁰

Inside Russia's strategic-studies world, the war in Ukraine has sharpened an old argument over whether limited nuclear use can serve Moscow's political purposes. The loudest advocate of a radical course is Sergei Karaganov, honorary chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and a former Kremlin adviser. In a June 2023 essay, he contended that a demonstrative strike with one or several low-yield tactical warheads, perhaps over the Black Sea or on an unpopulated area of Ukraine, would "sober the West" and compel it to curtail military support for Kiev.⁷¹

On the other hand, senior scholars at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences have mounted a sustained rebuttal (Arbatov⁷², Baranovsky, Buzhinsky, Oznobischev, Nikitin, Zagorsky⁷³). They argued that the notion of "escalate to de-escalate" is largely a Western projection onto Russian doctrine rather than a line actually embraced in General Staff planning.⁷⁴ They also debated that even a single use of nuclear weapons might lead to a very dangerous and uncontrollable escalation.

Western governments have tracked the Russian debate over limited nuclear use with growing attention since early 2022, and some have decided to reinforce their own non-strategic deterrence posture in response. In Washington, the most tangible step has been the acceleration of the B61-12 gravity bomb program. The National Nuclear Security Administration announced its first production unit in December 2022, several months earlier than initially planned, and by February 2025, the weapon was certified on dual-capable aircraft based at Büchel and Aviano,

⁶⁹ Right of Reply by the Deputy Head of the Russian Delegation K.V. Vorontsov during the Thematic Discussion on the Nuclear Weapons. Cluster at the First Committee of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly (14th Plenary Meeting) // Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, 2022. URL: <https://russiaun.ru/ru/news/181022v> (accessed: 25.08.2025). [Ответное слово заместителя руководителя российской делегации К.В.Воронцова в ходе тематической дискуссии по разделу «Ядерные вооружения» в Первом комитете 77-й сессии ГА ООН (14 пленарное заседание)].

⁷⁰ Chrisafis A. Need to use nuclear weapons has not arisen in Ukraine, says Putin // The Guardian, 2025. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/04/need-to-use-use-nuclear-weapons-has-not-arisen-in-ukraine-says-putin?> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁷¹ A Difficult but Necessary Decision // Russia in Global Affairs. URL: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-difficult-but-necessary-decision/> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁷² Alexei Arbatov: "We should not be talking about disarmament, but about restoring control." // Interfax, June, 2024. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/964173> (accessed: 27.08.2025). [Академик Алексей Арбатов: нужно говорить не о разоружении, а о восстановлении контроля].

⁷³ Baranovsky V, Buzhinsky E, Zagorsky A, Nikitin A, Oznobishchev A. Avoiding Nuclear War. Issues of Escalation / De-escalation of Armed Conflicts. When approaching the Nuclear Threshold // Polis. Political Studies, 2022. Pp. 114-134. URL:

https://open.mgimo.ru/bitstream/123456789/3710/1/polis_32_6_114_134.pdf?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com (accessed: 27.08.2025). [Избегать ядерной войны. Проблемы эскалации / деэскалации вооруженных конфликтов при приближении к «ядерному порогу»].

⁷⁴ Ibid.

including new F-35 as fielded by several European allies.⁷⁵ U.S. officials present the upgrade as a routine modernization that restores accuracy and safety to an aging stockpile; however, Kristensen and McKinzie argue that the bomb's variable yield and guided tail kit make it more usable, potentially lowering the threshold for escalation.⁷⁶

France also suggested the deployment of its TNWs in Eastern Europe. In June 2024, President Andrzej Duda suggested that French air-launched ASMP-A missiles could, in principle, be stationed temporarily in Poland under a bilateral arrangement analogous to existing U.S. nuclear sharing.⁷⁷ French officials did not endorse the idea but acknowledged that options for "forward contribution" to allied deterrence were being studied. A senior researcher at IFRI's Security Studies Center told the author that permanent stationing of French air-launched cruise missiles in Poland is not currently seen as politically or technically viable; should that assessment change in the future, she added, Paris would probably have to enlarge its sub-strategic nuclear arsenal.⁷⁸

London's answer has been quieter than Washington's or Paris's but still discernible in three areas: declaratory policy, alliance activity, and long-term modernization.

First, ministers have repeatedly used parliamentary statements to rebut any suggestion that limited nuclear use could be "manageable." During a House of Lords debate in October 2022, Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park stated that any employment of nuclear weapons would fundamentally alter the nature of the conflict. He emphasized that NATO possesses the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would far outweigh any potential benefits.⁷⁹ The Integrated Review Refresh, released six months later, restated the same position and kept in place the 2021 decision to lift the overall stockpile ceiling from 180 to "no more than 260" warheads, a change originally justified by "the evolving security environment posed by Russia."⁸⁰

Second, the UK has tightened operational links with US strategic bombers that periodically deploy to Europe. RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire hosted Bomber Task Forces in February 2023, August 2024, and January 2025; RAF Fairford has hosted U.S. heavy-bomber rotations for decades as part of a standing UK-US cooperation framework. The bombers have periodically flown from Gloucestershire since at least the early 1990s and resumed regular "Bomber Task Force"

⁷⁵ Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists: Vol 81, No 2. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rbul20/81/2?nav=tocList> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁷⁶ Capabilities of B61-12 Nuclear Bomb Increase Further // Federation of American Scientists. URL: <https://fas.tghp.co.uk/publication/b61-12hearing/> (accessed: 07.08.2025).

⁷⁷ Andrzej Duda, interview in Polska Times. June, 2024; Thomas G. Poland seeks French warheads // Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. June, 2024.

⁷⁸ Interview by the author. May, 2025.

⁷⁹ Ministerial Extracts: Russia: Tactical Nuclear Weapon Deployment. October, 2022. URL: <https://www.parliament.co.uk/debate/2022-10-11/lords/lords-chamber/russia-tactical-nuclear-weapon-deployment/ministerial-extracts?> (accessed: 07.08.2025).

⁸⁰ Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world // GOV.UK, 2023. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world> (accessed: 01.08.2025).

deployments after the conflict around Crimea in 2014. Yet, the war in Ukraine has added two notable twists: the tempo of visits has increased (annual rather than occasional) and each rotation now features tightly choreographed sorties in which nuclear-certifiable B-52Hs train alongside RAF Typhoons, F-35Bs and UK Voyager tankers, signaling that Britain's airspace, refueling assets and command links could plug straight into a NATO theatre-nuclear mission if circumstances ever required.

Western steps to modernize or posture non-strategic nuclear weapons have so far been largely symbolic, yet the very fact that theatre warheads remain outside any formal arms-control regime risks pushing NATO and France to rely on them more heavily, stimulating both vertical upgrades and potential horizontal spread. Although deep reductions would be politically and technically difficult for all parties, several targeted measures could still lower their profile: a negotiated ban on forward deployment in Eastern Europe, reciprocal pledges to refrain from invoking "limited nuclear war" as a planning concept, and a commitment not to mate nuclear warheads with dual-use delivery systems. Taken together, such steps would curb the incentives for escalation and proliferation without demanding immediate cuts in warhead numbers. In addition, Russian analysts propose a phased scheme that categorizes weapons by their deployment speed, rather than relying solely on "strategic" versus "tactical" labels. ICBMs and SLBMs on alert would form the highest-readiness tier; bomber warheads stored in on-base bunkers and U.S. tactical bombs at NATO airfields would sit in a 'lower readiness' one, with all TNWs kept in central depots being the slowest to employ. Capping or banning forward-deployed, dual-capable, long-range systems in the top tiers, they argue, would cut the danger of miscalculation and rushed escalation. Development of high-precision conventional weapons should continue in separate, clearly distinguishable programs so they cannot be mistaken for nuclear forces.⁸¹

Dual-Use and Hypersonic Threats

Before the war in Ukraine, the threat of hypersonic systems was less tangible. After the start of the special military operation, Russia used a number of high-precision conventional capabilities, which confirmed that hypersonic research had moved beyond the experimental stage.

⁸¹ Baranovsky V, Buzhinsky E, Zagorsky A, Nikitin A, Oznobishchev A. Avoiding Nuclear War. Issues of Escalation / De-escalation of Armed Conflicts. When approaching the Nuclear Threshold // Polis. Political Studies, 2022. Pp. 114-134. URL: https://open.mgimo.ru/bitstream/123456789/3710/1/polis_32_6_114_134.pdf?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com (accessed: 15.08.2025). [Избежать ядерной войны. Проблемы эскалации / деэскалации вооруженных конфликтов при приближении к «ядерному порогу»].

One of the areas of concern for both Britain and France are the new Russian systems with the European range, such as 9M729, *Kinzhal*, *Oreshnik* to a lesser extent ship-born *Zircon*.

Russia's employment of the air-launched *Kh-47M2 Kinzhal* ballistic missile against targets in western Ukraine in March 2022 drew close attention in London and Paris because it demonstrated, for the first time in combat, a weapon advertised to combine maneuverability with a range of roughly 2,000 kilometers. British and French analysts, while acknowledging that the tactical impact was limited, focused on the strategic implication that a fifteen-minute time-of-flight to many European capitals would compress decision-making cycles that have, for decades, relied on longer ballistic-missile warning timelines. For example, the UK's Integrated Review 2023 states that hypersonic weapons "do not negate but complicate nuclear deterrence" and that warning/decision time is shrinking.⁸² In parallel, the French Strategic National Review reached the same conclusions.⁸³

Other hypersonic systems used in the war included ship-borne 3M22 *Zircon* scramjet and the continued development of the *Avangard* boost-glide vehicle.

Both governments reacted by accelerating technology programs that had already been underway. The United Kingdom's Integrated Review Refresh of March 2023 elevated "novel missile threats" to a tier-one security risk. It allocated £3 billion to the Hypersonic Defense Architecture (HYDEF), which combines new space-based infrared sensors with research into a two-stage hit-to-kill interceptor pursued under AUKUS Pillar II. France, whose own ASN4G demonstrator has flown since 2019, continues work on the V-MaX series of maneuverable exo-atmospheric interceptors and funded experimental high-frequency over-the-horizon radars to evaluate wide-area detection options. Lionel Mazenc, a representative of Future Systems, one of MBDA's divisions, noted at the Paris Air Show that the speed of the interceptor is twice the speed of Russia's *Kinzhal* missile (which rather clearly indicates whom the future system is meant to counter).⁸⁴

Russian officials, for their part, argued that forward-deploying *Kinzhal* batteries to Kaliningrad announced in February 2024 was a proportionate response to what Moscow views as the eastward expansion of NATO strike and missile-defense capabilities.⁹ The move prompted the United Kingdom and France jointly to request Article 4 consultations inside NATO, leading to a decision to share U.S. Project PEDRO sensor-fusion algorithms with Alliance members on a classified basis.

⁸² Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world // GOV.UK. 2023. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023> (accessed: 22.08.2025).

⁸³ Revue nationale stratégique 2022 // SGDSN. Pp. 33-34. URL: <http://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/revue-nationale-strategique-2022> (accessed: 16.08.2025).

⁸⁴ Hypersonic Missile Spikes Begin to Erode // Kompas.id. URL: <https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2023/06/25/en-taji-rudal-hipersonik-mulai-terkikis> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

By early 2025, British and French policy papers converged on three assessments⁸⁵: first, that hypersonic weapons do not invalidate nuclear deterrence but shorten the margin for error in crisis signaling; the high-precision character of those weapons also poses them as a threat to European decision-making centers and might split the alliance in times of conflict. Additionally, a high-precision hypersonic strike on a European government crisis-management center, rather than a capital city per se, could trigger an alliance credibility crisis, as members debate whether to escalate or seek separate accommodations. Second, that European countries will have to invest in surveillance architecture able to track low-altitude, maneuvering threats in real time; and third, that reviving discussions covering flight-test transparency and non-nuclear payload limits could lower misperception risks.

The development and deployment of conventional strategic weapons are gaining increasing significance in the European security landscape. Several key European states, including Germany, France, Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Sweden, have initiated investments in their own long-range intermediate-range non-nuclear forces (LRINF). These efforts are partly intended as a strategic alternative to the United States' planned deployment of similar systems in Germany. However, the proliferation of such capabilities across Europe is unlikely to reach levels comparable to those of the Russian Federation. Consequently, Europe might be more interested in arms control than Russia. As Alexander Graef has argued, the expansion of conventional capabilities may serve as a catalyst for future arms control initiatives on the continent and might once again become instrumental to safeguarding the transformation of the European security order.⁸⁶

Before the war in Ukraine, President Putin had repeatedly framed Russian hypersonic weapon programs as a necessary response to the United States' 2002 withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the subsequent deployment of missile-defense systems, which Moscow viewed as capable of negating Russia's nuclear deterrent.⁸⁷ At the same time, Russian officials indicated that in the context of potential arms control talks with the US, Russia would be open to including discussions on other weapon types, including hypersonic weapons.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ The Development of Hypersonic Weapons in the US, China and Russia. 2025. URL: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/rusi-journal/development-hypersonic-weapons-us-china-and-russia>; Henrotin J. Armes hypersoniques : quels enjeux pour les armées ? // Ifri. URL: <https://www.ifri.org/fr/briefings/armes-hypersoniques-quels-enjeux-pour-les-armees> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁸⁶ Graef A. Beyond Stability: The politics of conventional arms control in Europe // Z Friedens und Konflforsch. 2021. Vol. 10, № 2. P. 219-245. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42597-022-00070-y> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁸⁷ Maintaining the Balance of Power: What Role Hypersonic Weapons Play in Ensuring Russia's Security". // Russia Today. 20 September, 2020. URL: <https://russian.rt.com/russia/article/784948-putin-avangard-giperzvuk-rakety-pro> (accessed: 11.08.2025).

⁸⁸ Lavrov: Russia Began Developing Hypersonic Weapons Because of the U.S. Missile Defense System // Rossiiskaya Gazeta. May, 2022. URL: <https://rg.ru/2022/05/01/lavrov-rossiia-zanialas-giperzvukovym-oruzhiem-iz-za-sistemy-pro-ssha.html> (accessed: 02.08.2025). [Лавров: Россия занялась гиперзвуковым оружием из-за системы ПРО США].

Many Russian analysts argue that introducing limits on the number or geographic deployment of Russia's European-range hypersonic systems could be possible.⁸⁹ It would probably require Western assurances not to field comparable long-range strike capabilities in Europe. Russian scholar Andrey Zagorsky suggested a formal pledge barring the carriage of nuclear warheads on these dual-capable platforms, recognizing, however, that effective on-site verification would remain a significant challenge.⁹⁰ Finally, the Russian position is that any such agreement be negotiated alongside discussions on US and NATO missile-defense (ABM) systems, reflecting a broader Moscow's view that strategic stability depends on addressing both offensive and defensive long-range capabilities in tandem.

Risk Reduction as a Complement to Arms Control

Both Britain and France see confidence-building and nuclear risk-reduction measures as a precondition for arms control in Europe. This position stems not only from the collapse of the European security architecture but also from the understanding that risk reduction and confidence-building measures in Eastern Europe will need to be part of the post-conflict settlement in Ukraine to ensure a sustainable peace. During the recent consultations of the 2024 NPT Preparatory Committee, both the United Kingdom and France reiterated that risk reduction might be conducive to arms control. In the G7 Non-Proliferation Directors Group Statement (May 2022), France and the UK, along with other G7 members, acknowledged the importance of transparency and predictability in nuclear arms control. During the second NPT Preparatory Committee in July 2024, the UK reaffirmed its commitment to transparent, verifiable, and irreversible nuclear disarmament.⁹¹ In President Macron's speech on Defense and Deterrence Strategy, France expressed its readiness to participate in discussions among the five nuclear-weapon states recognized under the NPT, focusing on nuclear disarmament priorities, confidence-building measures, and transparency of atomic arsenals and strategies⁹².

⁸⁹ Arbatov A. Controlling Nuclear Arms in a Multipolar World. *Survival*: December 2024-January, 2025. URL: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003498025-7/controlling-nuclear-arms-multipolar-world-alexey-arbatov> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁹⁰ Zagorski A. The Future of European Arms Control and the OSCE after the War in Ukraine// Security and Human Rights Monitor. December, 2024. URL: <https://www.shrmonitor.org/the-future-of-european-arms-control-and-the-osce-after-the-war-in-ukraine/> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁹¹ Second Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: UK statement on Pillar 1 // GOV.UK, 2024. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/second-preparatory-committee-for-the-2026-review-conference-to-the-treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons-uk-statement-on-pillar-1> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁹² Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy // Elysee.fr, 2020. URL: <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy> (accessed: 11.08.2025).

The UNIDIR report on this issue highlighted that both France and the UK seek improvements in communication mechanisms and mutual understanding to help prevent miscalculation or unintended escalation. Both countries deem the establishment of enhanced communication channels as a necessary measure. Besides, they both view notification agreements as pragmatic tools to mitigate the risks of strategic misperception.

The UK's approach is shaped by concerns over a range of nuclear risk scenarios, including the possibility of accidental use, unauthorized launch, or doctrinal ambiguity. The UK is particularly wary of the misinterpretation of dual-capable systems, which could lead to misinterpretation during crises. This is further complicated by the blurring of regional and global strategic lines, such as those between the Russia-Europe and China-US contexts. For Britain, risk reduction involves not only doctrinal clarity but also behavioral consistency in military exercises and force posture, which it views as essential to maintaining credible deterrence and reducing misperceptions.

The Russian perception of risk reduction diverges notably from that of Western nuclear powers. From Moscow's viewpoint, meaningful risk reduction cannot occur under current conditions, particularly while Western countries continue to engage in the conflict and supply weapons to Ukraine, and as the UK and France provide long-range intermediate nuclear forces (LRINF) support. The UNIDIR report states that Moscow concerns development and potential deployment of advanced U.S. precision-strike systems, including cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons. Consequently, Russia advocates for an expanded framework of arms control that goes beyond the nuclear realm to include advanced conventional weapons. Among the main risks Moscow views is the danger of uncontrollable nuclear escalation, particularly in an environment where doctrines promoting "limited nuclear options" are gaining traction in the West.

Despite these profound disagreements, there remains a shared recognition among all P5 members, including Russia, France, and the UK, that the P5 process might serve as a useful platform for managing nuclear risks. While its functionality is currently strained by geopolitical tensions, particularly over Ukraine, the P5 dialogue is still regarded by France and the UK as a necessary and irreplaceable platform. From Moscow's standpoint, nuclear risk reduction requires more than procedural or technical arrangements; it necessitates addressing the root causes of confrontation, including the recognition of each nuclear power's core security interests.

Thus, regulation of the conflict in Ukraine seems to be a pre-condition for a constructive risk reduction and confidence building dialogue. There's also no guarantee that risk-reduction and confidence-building dialogue would be followed by engagement in arms control. In the increasing complexity of strategic and non-strategic systems, the linkage between nuclear and conventional arms, as well as the lack of trust and willingness of the parties to cooperate, would make

engagement in conventional arms control even harder to reach. As Russian scholar Andrey Zagorsky argues, ‘in the security environment dominated by mutual deterrence, the latter will enjoy priority and determine the room for arms control, particularly for numerical and geographic limitations.’⁹³ Russia and the West would need to address the full spectrum of strategic stability threats, including those posed by conventional forces, dual-use technologies, and misperception during crises. The durability of these efforts, however, will depend heavily on the broader political environment and the willingness of states to prioritize cooperative security.

II.3 Factors Influencing the Development of Nuclear Arms Control in Europe

II.3.1 China’s Approach toward Nuclear Arms Control Engagement: Implications for France and the United Kingdom

China’s rejection of participation in nuclear arms control negotiations stems from several interrelated factors rooted in national strategic logic and evolving geopolitical concerns. One of the primary reasons is Beijing’s assessment that the current global security environment is not conducive to arms reductions. Chinese officials have repeatedly cited increasing tensions in Asia, particularly surrounding Taiwan, as well as the conflict in Ukraine, as evidence that major power competition is intensifying rather than diminishing. In a 2023 statement, the Chinese Foreign Ministry criticized what it termed a “Cold War mentality” among Western powers and emphasized that peace and security must precede disarmament.⁹⁴ The implication is that as long as the United States continues to support Taiwan militarily and NATO expands its role in Europe, China sees little incentive to limit its strategic capabilities.

Another critical factor is the ongoing expansion of China’s nuclear arsenal. While Beijing has historically maintained a relatively small deterrent force, recent developments documented by the U.S. Department of Defense suggest a substantial buildup is underway, with projections that China’s arsenal could exceed 1,000 warheads by 2030.⁹⁵ This modernization includes new delivery systems, silo-based ICBMs, and hypersonic glide vehicles. Simultaneously, China has retained a posture of deliberate intransparency regarding its nuclear forces.

⁹³ Zagorski A. The Future of European Arms Control and the OSCE after the War in Ukraine // Security and Human Rights Monitor. December, 2024. URL: <https://www.shrmonitor.org/the-future-of-european-arms-control-and-the-osce-after-the-war-in-ukraine/> (accessed: 04.08.2025).

⁹⁴ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on February 24, 2023 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202405/t20240530_11347472.html (accessed: 26.08.2025).

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2024.PDF> (accessed: 20.07.2025).

China has also consistently maintained that any meaningful arms control discussions must begin with significant reductions by the United States and Russia, the two states that hold over 90% of the world's nuclear weapons. Chinese diplomats, including at the Conference on Disarmament and NPT Review Conferences, have reiterated that the “disparity in arsenals” makes trilateral negotiations premature. This position aligns, in part, with longstanding French and British views. Both Paris and London have supported the principle that progress in arms control should be led by the states with the largest stockpiles.

France and the United Kingdom, however, are increasingly interested in China's engagement in nuclear risk reduction and transparency measures. Both countries support China's participation in the P5 process, a diplomatic dialogue among the five recognized nuclear-weapon states under the NPT. This process includes discussions on strategic risk reduction, nuclear doctrine, and transparency. In 2019, the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee invited Dr. Tong Zhao to testify on China's approach to arms control and the possible multilateralization of the INF Treaty.⁹⁶

As China's nuclear arsenal grows and approaches parity with smaller nuclear states, France and the UK may come to see a growing threat in China. In a scenario where Western countries would want to see the US, China, and Russia involved in a trilateral arms control, it would be rational for Russia to use it as an opportunity to argue that the British and French arsenals must also be subject to a multilateral framework. The British diplomat noted that Britain and France more likely wouldn't want to be missed out if a trilateral engagement begins. At the same time, even if they were ever willing to join, nuclear strategic arms control wouldn't be their starting point, as their interest lies much more in substrategic weapons.

Thus, the convergence of Chinese, French, and British positions around the principle of prior U.S.-Russia reductions may provide a basis for consensus in the short term and delay any multilateral arms control engagement. However, the long-term trajectory of Chinese nuclear expansion may provide a chance for Russia to compel the UK and France to reassess their roles as potential participants in the next phase of arms control negotiations.

II.3.2 UK-France Nuclear Cooperation: A Catalyst for a Broader Arms Control Regime?

Similar to the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S.-Russian rapprochement spurred closer UK-French nuclear cooperation in late 2000, when the New START was being discussed. Since the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties in 2010, UK-French defense collaboration has expanded beyond nuclear deterrence to encompass interoperability of armed forces, intelligence sharing, and joint

⁹⁶ Oral evidence. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and nuclear disarmament, February, 2019. URL: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/9018/html> (accessed: 11.08.2025).

capability development. This agreement laid the groundwork for deeper military integration, enabling seamless operational transfers, shared Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, and enhanced communication networks between their armed forces.

Another key focus of this cooperation has been the certification of nuclear warheads through joint hydrodynamic trials, ensuring the safety and reliability of their arsenals as the U.S. and Russia reduce their stockpiles under arms control agreements. The UK and France collaborate on nuclear testing through a joint facility called EPURE, located at the French Atomic Energy Commission's (CEA) Valduc site. While this collaboration remains largely undisclosed, its implications for nuclear strategy and arms control are significant. However, one of the more ambitious objectives of UK-French nuclear cooperation – the deeper integration of their nuclear forces – was never fully realized. Discussions about the potential convergence of UK and French nuclear submarine forces have occurred at both ministerial and parliamentary levels, and have been examined within academic and political circles. However, these talks have made little progress due to the insurmountable challenge of establishing shared operational control. A senior diplomat at the British Foreign Service stated in an interview with the author that the issue is no longer on the agenda. Instead, UK-French cooperation has been centered on joint nuclear research facilities and the sharing of information. This was also confirmed by a French expert from the Deterrence and Proliferation Program at IFRI, who was involved in the consultations on the update of the Lancaster House agreements in July 2025. On July 10, 2025, France and the United Kingdom signed a historic nuclear cooperation agreement, known as the Northwood Declaration, which has already been dubbed in London as “Lancaster Agreements 2.0.” The agreement envisions closer collaboration between the two countries in nuclear and broader military fields. French President Emmanuel Macron emphasized that the countries “do not exclude coordination of deterrence means. This is a signal that both our partners and adversaries should be aware of.” This echoes historical statements from the 1990s Checker Declaration and the 2010 Lancaster Agreements, which noted that “there is no situation in which the vital interests of one country could be affected without threatening the interests of the other.”

The creation of the Nuclear Steering Group within the agreement marks a shift from consultations on doctrine and scientific matters to actual strategic, technical, and operational coordination. H. Fayet, an expert from the French Institute of International Relations, told *Le Monde* that this group continues the joint nuclear commission established in 1992 and opens the way to joint submarine patrols and strategic aviation exercises between the two countries⁹⁷.

⁹⁷ France and the United Kingdom tighten the "coordination" of their nuclear forces in the face of the Russian threat // *Le Monde*, 2025. URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/07/11/la-france-et-le-royaume-uniront-la-coordination-de-leurs-forces-nucleaires-face-a-la-menace-russe_6620577_3210.html (accessed:

There are different views among academia on how cooperation can be improved. Several British, French, and US experts, such as Tertrais B, Fayet H, Lewis J, and Cormairie P, emphasize the need to improve coordination of nuclear submarine patrols among their countries in the Atlantic and Pacific. This recommendation is driven by several factors: the rising strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the imperative to strengthen NATO and optimize the substantial costs associated with ongoing modernization programs, and the existence of a solid technological foundation that could support deeper cooperation.

To advance this cooperation, these experts argue that more structured and frequent dialogues on shared interests are crucial, particularly concerning crisis scenarios that involve nuclear weapon use or strategic signaling. Joint crisis-management exercises, including tabletop simulations, could foster better mutual understanding and prevent miscommunication. As Jeffrey Lewis and Bruno Tertrais argue, while there is a widespread assumption that the three NATO nuclear powers would coordinate effectively in a crisis, the 2013 Syria chemical weapons exercise suggested that strategic communication and joint decision-making often break down under pressure⁹⁸. Furthermore, expanding scientific and technical collaboration, especially in areas such as nuclear safety, reactor security, and cutting-edge technologies like AI and cyber defense, would bolster the resilience and effectiveness of these forces⁹⁹.

Closer coordination of SSBN patrols among the UK, France, and the US could carry significant strategic implications for Russia. A shift in patrol distribution between the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters may reduce immediate pressure on Russian targets, even though these would remain within striking range, while allowing Western deterrents to better address the growing nuclear challenge posed by China. This reallocation of assets could also prompt closer strategic alignment between China and Russia, particularly in the coordination of their own SSBN patrols, potentially reinforcing a more integrated adversarial posture. Additionally, as the French expert noted, it is possible to integrate a French SSN into the patrol of a British SSBN, and vice versa, in the future.

Importantly, such coordination would not render any one country strategically vulnerable. For instance, even if a French SSBN were patrolling the Pacific while French interests were threatened in the Atlantic, France would still retain a second submarine at port capable of launching a retaliatory strike. This underlines that closer coordination does not equate to strategic

01.08.2025). [La France et le Royaume-Uni resserrent la «coordination» de leurs forces nucléaires face à la menace russe].

⁹⁸ Lewis J., and Tertrais B. Deterrence at Three: US, UK and French Nuclear Cooperation // Survival. IISS Website, 2015. P. 29-52. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00396338.2015.1068554> (accessed: 19.08.2025).

⁹⁹ Cormarie P. Can the United Kingdom and France Team Up in the Third Nuclear Age? // War on the Rocks, 2024. URL: <https://warontherocks.com/2024/10/can-the-united-kingdom-and-france-team-up-in-the-third-nuclear-age/> (accessed: 17.08.2025).

dependence, provided there is a robust political framework. An example is the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty declaration that the vital interests of one country cannot be compromised without those of the other being equally affected, a principle that could underpin deeper bilateral or trilateral coordination.

Whether the coordination evolves trilaterally (with the US) or bilaterally (UK-France), China's inclusion in arms control dialogues would be pivotal. France and the UK, as independent nuclear powers, have both the interest and credibility to advocate for multilateral arms control that includes China. Their deeper involvement at sea could serve not only as a step toward operational efficiency and deterrence credibility, but also as a diplomatic leverage to draw Beijing into much-needed discussions on global nuclear stability.

Indeed, one notable proposal from the Russian academic community, particularly advanced by Dr. Alexey Arbatov, advocates for structuring future multilateral arms control around sea-based deterrents. Arbatov suggests that strategic arms reductions could be pursued through equal ceilings on submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) with one cap for Russia, and a combined ceiling for Britain and France. Another variation would involve regional ceilings in the Atlantic, applied collectively to the UK, France, the US, and Russia. This regional logic offers flexibility and scalability: for example, an SLBM cap could be embedded as a sublevel within a renewed U.S.-Russia strategic arms treaty, such as a follow-on to New START.

This approach offers a pragmatic path for bringing the UK and France into arms control discussions without demanding full integration into existing bilateral U.S.-Russia frameworks, and it does not necessarily require reductions in nuclear capabilities. As one of the senior Russian diplomats mentioned in a commentary to the author, offsetting their arsenals might be of different forms and not necessarily involve cuts. While such ceilings do not currently account for China or reflect British and French strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific, they suggest a move toward regionally segmented arms control, which could better reflect today's complex strategic geography. Indeed, both Russia and the US have a precise distribution of their submarine fleets (for the Atlantic and Pacific). The UK and France seem to be interested in ensuring their presence in both oceans, at least with one SSBN. Chinese SSBNs (nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines) currently operate only in the Pacific, specifically, the Western Pacific and the South China Sea.

SSBN Base Distribution and Numbers of P5 States

Country	Main SSBN Base(s)	Region	Estimated Number of SSBNs	Notes
 United States	 Kings Bay, Georgia	Atlantic	~6-7	14 Ohio-class total
	 Bangor, Washington	Pacific	~7-8	
 Russia	 Gadzhievo, Kola Peninsula	Atlantic	~6	Delta IV and Borei SSBNs
	 Vilyuchinsk, Kamchatka	Pacific	~4-5	
 China	 Yalong Bay, Hainan Island	Pacific	6 (Jin-class)	Only Pacific patrols Future Type 096 may expand reach
 United Kingdom	 HMNB Clyde (Faslane), Scotland	Atlantic	4	Vanguard-class One submarine on patrol at all times
 France	 Île Longue, Brest.	Atlantic	4	Triomphant-class One submarine on patrol at all times

Source: *Nuclear Notebook // Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. URL:

<https://thebulletin.org/nuclear-notebook/>

If China were eventually willing to declare its SSBN numbers, it could pave the way for establishing regional ceilings for all five nuclear powers (the P5) in the Atlantic and Pacific.

In conclusion, the evolution of UK-French nuclear cooperation, although falling short of fully integrated deterrent forces, has nonetheless laid a solid foundation for deeper strategic alignment, operational efficiency, and cost-sharing. By formalizing coordinated SSBN patrols, joint air-patrol missions, and robust crisis-management exercises, London and Paris not only strengthen Allied unity but also project a clearer, more predictable posture to would-be adversaries. As both navies extend their presence into the Indo-Pacific, these bilateral advances could serve as

a springboard for novel, multilateral arms-control frameworks focused on submarine forces. At the same time, the ultimate scope of any such regime will depend on several unknowns, most notably the trajectory of China's nuclear modernization, Beijing's appetite for arms-control dialogue, and the detailed parameters of future UK-French collaboration. Navigating these uncertainties will be essential if Europe's two independent nuclear powers are to translate their growing partnership into lasting, continent-wide stability.

Conclusions

Based on both historical experience and the contemporary security environment, several conclusions emerge regarding the prospects for European participation in arms control.

Historically, Soviet proposals to subject British and French nuclear arsenals to the same ceilings as those of the United States failed due to a combination of technological and political factors. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, both France and the United Kingdom were still in the early stages of developing and modernizing their deterrent capabilities. Neither government was willing to constrain these nascent forces through treaty obligations, particularly while the United States and the Soviet Union maintained far larger arsenals.

Moreover, Soviet demands to halt U.S.-UK and U.S.-French nuclear cooperation introduced a politically untenable condition: agreeing to common ceilings with Washington would have implied that NATO's nuclear posture was a unified enterprise, raising concerns in Paris and London that their modernization and targeting plans could be subordinated to broader Alliance priorities. Additionally, Moscow appeared to treat this issue instrumentally, using it as leverage in the SALT negotiations without genuine expectations of binding commitments from London or Paris, while considering their arsenals when calculating the ceilings.

In today's strategic environment, despite major changes, neither France nor the United Kingdom has expressed interest in participating in strategic nuclear arms control. At the same time, based on official statements, Russia appears to believe that further bilateral reductions, especially under current conditions, would not allow it to maintain a credible deterrence against all three nuclear powers. Therefore, if France and the UK wish to see further reductions in nuclear arsenals, they must recognize that their own postures will increasingly factor into the broader strategic equation.

Given these dynamics, it is difficult to envision any near-term progress on strategic nuclear arms control involving France and the United Kingdom. The interest in such engagement appears to lie more with Russia than with these two states. However, suppose Russia is genuinely interested in involving France and the UK. In that case, it may need to focus on areas of arms control that align more closely with its priorities, while still being relevant to its own security interests.

The war in Ukraine, the development of Russian regional strike capabilities, and uncertainties surrounding the credibility of continued U.S. engagement in Europe have all stimulated renewed interest in broader European security architecture. Within this evolving landscape, France and the UK have become more inclined to engage in discussions on the future European security order.

In the realm of arms control, their primary interests lie in conventional arms control, including dual-use systems. Potential measures could include geographic limitations on the deployment of certain systems, commitments not to deploy or even produce nuclear warheads for dual-use platforms, and restrictions on the development or production of specific system types. Although Russia currently holds significant advantages in these capabilities, it may be motivated to engage in discussions to mitigate long-term risks, particularly concerning the future development of French hypersonic systems or their potential transfer to third parties.

A second area of interest for France and the UK is the reduction of the role and salience of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs). Unlike the United States, both countries historically assigned less strategic value to TNWs in Europe and have at times viewed them as destabilizing. As the role of TNWs has grown during the war in Ukraine, Paris and London may see value in taking the lead on certain risk-reduction measures to enhance their leadership profile in European security. In a trilateral format, such measures could include permanent non-deployment of TNWs in third countries, pledges to avoid nuclear threats, and reaffirmed commitments to centralized warhead storage. However, actual arms reductions are unlikely: the United States would be reluctant to forgo TNWs as a reassurance measure for allies, and Russia, benefiting from its superiority in these systems, would resist cuts.

A third area of focus involves risk reduction and confidence-building measures, including the restoration of military-to-military communication channels and pre-notification systems. Here, the Russian argument should be met that such steps can only follow a resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, and if its own security concerns are taken seriously.

As for strategic nuclear arms control, this remains a longer-term and currently less realistic goal. Yet certain trends may gradually increase interest among the UK and France in this domain. Enhanced cooperation between France and the UK or among France, the UK, and the United States in areas such as nuclear patrol coordination and crisis decision-making exercises may foster a convergence of strategic interests. Such alignment could reduce operational costs while preserving autonomy, potentially laying the groundwork for future dialogue with Russia or China.

China's role also looms large in future arms control dynamics. Both France and the UK have increasingly oriented their deterrents toward Asia, and Beijing's opacity and growing arsenal could eventually prompt its involvement in arms control discussions, at least at a consultative level, if Washington can craft a framework that addresses China's core concerns. In this context, London and Paris may gradually find greater value in participating in broader arms control dialogues alongside the arms control track with China.

Ultimately, the future of arms control will depend on the recognition of all parties' security concerns, sufficient political will, and technological developments. The combination of strategic

convergence, risk perception, and technological evolution will shape whether France and the United Kingdom become more engaged in multilateral or trilateral arms control frameworks in the years to come.

Recommendations for Russia

1. **Focus on Areas of Shared Interest First** to reinvigorate arms control dialogue, Russia should prioritize domains where all sides, particularly France and the United Kingdom, have clear and overlapping interests. These include:
 - Conventional arms control, particularly in Europe, where the erosion of existing mechanisms has increased uncertainty and risks;
 - Dual-use technologies, including emerging capabilities such as hypersonic weapons, autonomous systems, and cyber tools, which raise mutual concerns;
 - Risk reduction and crisis communication, including transparency measures, military-to-military contacts, and incident prevention tools.

As a pragmatic interim step, Russia could propose structured expert-level consultations on these themes. These consultations would help rebuild trust, clarify positions, and provide a platform for future agreements. Importantly, they could serve as a gateway for eventually drawing France and the UK more fully into broader arms control frameworks.

2. **Engage China to Incentivize Broader Arms Control Framework**
Russia should explore ways to include China more meaningfully in arms control discussions. While China has resisted formal trilateral arms control with the U.S. and Russia, carefully crafted formats such as non-binding strategic dialogues or technical working groups may prove more acceptable to Beijing.

A trilateral dialogue (Russia-China-U.S.), even if initially informal, would underscore the changing global nuclear landscape and could help create pressure and incentives for France and the UK to reconsider their roles in strategic arms control. A more multipolar dialogue may appear more legitimate and relevant to them.

3. **Modernize and Deepen the Argument for French and British Involvement:**

- Clarify why bilateral reductions with the United States are no longer sufficient in a world with multiple nuclear powers. Strategic stability today cannot be preserved solely through U.S.-Russia agreements, given the growing roles of other nuclear-armed states;
- Emphasize the growing operational and political integration of France and the UK in confrontational postures toward Russia. Their active involvement in crises close to Russian borders, alongside initiatives to develop potentially destabilizing systems (e.g., long-range intermediate-range missiles, hypersonic weapons, and discussions around a “European deterrent”), increases the risks of nuclear escalation involving all parties. At the same time, France and the UK have their own concerns about certain Russian capabilities, which also contribute to strategic mistrust. In this context, the inclusion of these states in arms control dialogue should not be framed as a demand, but as a practical step toward reducing mutual risks and ensuring greater transparency and predictability in an increasingly complex and interconnected nuclear environment;
- Draw a parallel to the U.S. concept of “integrated deterrence” against Russia and China, where multiple allied nuclear and conventional forces are coordinated. Similarly, Russia now faces a de facto coordinated deterrent from France, the UK, and the U.S., a reality that must be reflected in any strategic stability dialogue;
- Avoid focusing on placing all nuclear forces under the same ceilings or symmetry-based constraints. Instead, propose more flexible and tailored arms control frameworks. Options might include transparency measures, mutual declarations, limiting the areas of deployment, crisis communication mechanisms, or limits on deployment of nuclear warheads on dual-use systems, etc.

ANNEXES

Appendix I. U.S. and USSR strategic force levels, mid-1974 and mid-1975.

Type of Force	Operational in Mid-1974	Operational in Mid-1975
	U.S.	USSR
Offensive		
ICBM Launchers	1054	1575
SLBM Launchers	656	660
Intercontinental Bombers	496	140
Total	2206	2375
SSBN Submarines	41	47-50
Missile Throwweight (ICBM & SLBM) (in million lbs)	3.8	6.5
Force Loadings (warheads & bombs)	7940	2600
Defensive		
ABM Launchers	0	64
SAM Launchers	261	9800
Air-Defense Interceptors	532	2600
Surveillance Radars	67	4000

Appendix II. British and French Forces Estimated Throw Weights.

British and French Forces Estimated Throw weights

Country	SSBNs (1975)	SLBMs per SSBN	Total SLBMs	Warheads per SLBM	Total Warheads	Throw Weight per Missile (lbs)	Estimated Total Throw Weight (million lbs)
France	4	16	64	1	64	3,300	~0.211
Britain	4	16	64	3	192	2,750	~0.176

Appendix III. Estimated nuclear warhead stockpiles for the United States, Soviet Union/Russia, United Kingdom, and France from 1970 to 1990.

Estimated nuclear warhead stockpiles for the United States, Soviet Union/Russia, United Kingdom, and France from 1970 to 1990

YEAR	US	USSR	UK	FRANCE
1970	26,008	11,643	394	36
1975	27,519	19,055	492	188
1980	23,368	30,062	492	250
1985	21,392	39,197	422	360

Appendix IV. SSBN Base Distribution and Numbers of P5 States.

SSBN Base Distribution and Numbers of P5 States

Country	Main SSBN Base(s)	Region	Estimated Number of SSBNs	Notes
 United States	 Kings Bay, Georgia	Atlantic	~6-7	14 Ohio-class total
	 Bangor, Washington	Pacific	~7-8	
 Russia	 Gadzhievo, Kola Peninsula	Atlantic	~6	Delta IV and Borei SSBNs
	 Vilyuchinsk, Kamchatka	Pacific	~4-5	
 China	 Yalong Bay, Hainan Island	Pacific	6 (Jin-class)	Only Pacific patrols Future Type 096 may expand reach
 United Kingdom	 HMNB Clyde (Faslane), Scotland	Atlantic	4	Vanguard-class One submarine on patrol at all times
 France	 Île Longue, Brest.	Atlantic	4	Triomphant-class One submarine on patrol at all times

About The Author

Ms. Alexandra **Zubenko** is PIR Center Consultant.

She holds an MA in Global Security, Nuclear Policy, and WMD Nonproliferation – an international dual degree program developed jointly by MGIMO University, PIR Center, and the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, USA.

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In 2023, she worked as a Senior Research Assistant at the Center for International Security of the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS). From 2021 to 2023, she held various positions at PIR Center, advancing from Intern to Coordinator of the project “Oral History of Nuclear Nonproliferation: Voices from Russia” and Junior Research Fellow in the Nuclear Nonproliferation and Russia Program.

Her research interests include nuclear nonproliferation, arms control, Russian and U.S. nuclear policy, and emerging challenges to global strategic stability.

Reviews of the master's thesis defended at MGIMO University, on which this report is based

“The dissertation of Ms. Zubenko represents an original research work focusing on the independence of British and French nuclear forces and the reasons for their lack of inclusion in ultimately bilateral SALT and START arms control processes. Ms. Zubenko's choice of a topic is undoubtedly of great scholarly interest. In addition, she also makes a number of policy recommendations for Russian policymakers seeking to involve Britain and France in strategic arms control, recommendations that may be worthy of further discussions.”

**Dr. Jeffrey Lewis,
Professor; Director, East Asia Nonproliferation Project (EANP); Middlebury Institute of
International Studies**

“Based on the intensive study of primary sources, memoirs, interviews and literature, Alexandra convincingly argues that, at various stages of US-Soviet negotiations, earlier Moscow's demands introduced a politically untenable condition. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, France and the UK were still in the process of developing their deterrent capabilities. Neither government was ready to constrain their nascent forces while the US and the USSR maintained far larger arsenals. Besides, Moscow appeared to see the issue primarily as leverage in the SALT negotiations without genuine expectations of extracting binding commitments from London or Paris, but seeking to account their arsenals in the limitations negotiated with the US. Given the depth of the analysis, Alexandra's research represents a valuable contribution to the study of the evolution of the British and French nuclear postures, as well as of the prospects for an eventual multilateralization of nuclear arms control.”

**Dr. Andrey V. Zagorski,
PhD in History, Head of the Department of Disarmament and Conflict Resolution, Head of
the Nonproliferation and Arms Limitation Section at the Primakov Institute of World
Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) of the Russian Academy of Sciences,
member of the PIR Center Advisory Board since 2014**

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