

European proliferation talking points

What began as an idea [floated](#) by French President Emmanuel Macron about extending France's nuclear weapons for broader European use, has quickly escalated into a full-blown debate about nuclear proliferation as leaders scramble to respond to uncertainties raised by Trump's many changes in foreign policy. Across Europe and Asia, political leaders are openly discussing new nuclear armament, with some even [suggesting](#) stationing nuclear weapons on their soil. These suggestions are being put forward in open defiance of their country's international legal commitments to the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

ICAN has put these talking points together as a guide for campaigner to discuss the issue and raise concerns with relevant stakeholders.

Nuclear weapons in Europe are meant to be used in Europe:

It's dishonest to discuss nuclear weapons in abstract terms when their intended military use is in a European war theater. These weapons are meant to be launched and exploded on European soil, with all the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that entails. The mere presence of nuclear weapons in Europe increases the likelihood of nuclear conflict, putting millions of innocent civilians at risk. This is not a hypothetical threat—it's a very real and present danger.

A European nuclear force violates the NPT and the TPNW:

All European countries have legally binding commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) not to accept control over nuclear weapons. The proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe would undermine the NPT, which is already under strain. Without the NPT, other nations could pursue nuclear weapons, making Europe and the world even more dangerous. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), representing a growing

global norm, also calls for complete nuclear disarmament, and any move to expand Europe's nuclear capabilities would contradict this goal.

Normalizing nuclear weapons benefits Russia:

The only beneficiaries of expanding nuclear weapons in Europe are aggressors who seek to normalize their use. Creating or expanding a European nuclear arsenal plays into their hands, reinforcing the idea that nuclear weapons are a legitimate tool of statecraft. This creates more instability, making it easier for rogue actors to justify nuclear proliferation.

A European nuclear "shield" is a fantasy:

The idea that France could provide a "nuclear shield" for Europe is deeply flawed and rests on the *hope* that Paris would risk its own survival to defend another nation. The European readiness to actually use nuclear weapons would need to be consistently higher than Russia's readiness. Out-detering Putin, a wanted war criminal, does not sound like a good strategy. But even if: Not even France and the UK combined could realistically hope to inflict more damage on Russia than they would suffer in retaliation. The concept of a European nuclear force offering protection is an illusion, not a strategic reality.

Nuclear build-up in Europe would take too long to be a meaningful security policy.

Any plans to build up a European nuclear weapons arsenal would take several years of continued political will and massive financial investments in nuclear weapons programmes. Even proponents of nuclear deterrence would agree that it cannot reduce the perceived imminent threat or provide security anytime soon.

General Talking Points on Nuclear Deterrence

Nuclear deterrence fails to guarantee security:

The notion that nuclear weapons provide security is based on the assumption that nuclear deterrence can never fail. However, deterrence only functions if the threat of mass destruction is credible—meaning a government is willing to commit mass murder on a scale never before seen. This is a deeply troubling principle that should not underpin any security policy.

Nuclear deterrence creates a dangerous cycle:

For nuclear weapons to be a credible deterrent, a country must be willing to destroy cities and kill millions of civilians. But if one country is willing to cross that line, why wouldn't the other country be equally willing to do the same in return? The logic of deterrence works in both directions, making it an unstable and dangerous basis for security. It fosters an arms race that increases the risk of catastrophic conflict.

Nuclear weapons are not "just big normal weapons":

Nuclear weapons are fundamentally different from conventional weapons. They are indiscriminate, inhumane, and militarily useless, and leave a contaminating legacy beyond the battlefield. The war in Ukraine, for instance, is being fought with conventional forces—soldiers, tanks, drones, and artillery—not nuclear weapons. For both Russia and Ukraine, nuclear weapons are not a viable military option. There is a reason that weapons designed to cause indiscriminate, long-term harm are prohibited, because they do not protect populations and instead put them at higher risk of harm.

Nuclear deterrence is sanitized language for "ready and willing to mass murder civilian populations":

The core of nuclear deterrence is the threat of annihilating entire populations. Governments relying on nuclear deterrence must maintain the credibility of this threat, signaling that they are willing to commit mass murder. This is not a legitimate security policy—it is a moral, legal and political abyss that must be rejected.

The risk of nuclear conflict is already too high:

The threat of nuclear weapons being used again is at its highest point in decades. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has placed the Doomsday Clock closer to midnight than ever before, signaling the growing risk of nuclear war. The time to act is now—before the threat becomes a reality.

80 years of living under the threat of nuclear war:

It has been 80 years since nuclear weapons were first detonated (Trinity) and used in war (during the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Survivors have driven the call for nuclear disarmament through initiatives like the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The TPNW is a clear and urgent call to abolish nuclear weapons once and for all.

The Future of Europe will Not be Written in the Mushroom Clouds: