



VMUN 2026

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

BACKGROUND GUIDE



Vancouver Model United Nations

The Twenty-Fifth Annual Session | January 23rd-25th, 2026

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Nicole Liu and it is my distinct pleasure to serve as the Director of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for VMUN 2026. Alongside me are your Chair Caitlyn Chen and Assistant Director Bijan Markazi; we are honoured to serve as your dais over the course of this conference.

I first stumbled into the committee room two years ago, not having the slightest clue of what a primary speaker's list was. I proceeded to bumble my way through speeches, even getting on my knees in front of the entire committee at one point. Yet, I left with something far more important: a newfound love for Model United Nations. Since then, it has given me some of my most meaningful experiences, helping me grow not just as a delegate, but also enabling me to find my voice as a young person. I hope that all of you, whether this be your first or tenth conference, will be able to grow in some capacity and walk away with new experiences, friendships, and memories.

Over the course of three days, delegates will explore two important topics: *Presence in the Arctic* and *Revisiting Nuclear Deterrence Strategies*. Both selected topics are highly relevant to today's geopolitical landscape and the economic, political, and military interests of NATO member states. While studying the background guides will allow you to gain an understanding on their respective topics, I encourage you to conduct your own research to come up with creative solutions and build your country's stance.

I wish you the best of luck in your preparations and look forward to a weekend of fruitful debate. Should you have any questions or concerns leading up to the conference, do not hesitate to contact me at nato@vmun.com.

Sincerely,
Nicole Liu
NATO Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For NATO, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers.

Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **January 12, 2026, at 23:59 PT**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email. Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award. The email address for this committee is nato@vmun.com.

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Presence in the Arctic

Overview

Though the Arctic sits at the northernmost point of the globe, it is drawing increasing geopolitical, economic, and environmental heat. Characterized by its distinctive polar conditions, the region has long been contested by Denmark (specifically Greenland), Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, and Canada.¹ Pressured by evolving environmental conditions, shifting political dynamics, and vast economic potential, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) must assert its role within the Arctic, adapting to the far-reaching consequences that developments there may bring.



Figure 1: Map of the Arctic.²

With roots in World War II and the Cold War, all regional actors have long recognized the Arctic's potential as a strategic flashpoint, where developments can carry severe global consequences.³ This is further emphasized by the fact that within the Arctic lies the nearest proximity between Russia and the United States, with the distance

¹ J. Brian Bird, Terence Edward Armstrong, "Arctic," Britannica, August 20, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Arctic>.

² "Arctic Maps - Visualizing the Arctic," The Arctic Institute, May 17, 2016, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-maps/>.

³ Sayantan Halder, "The Russia-China push in the arctic — a new strategic flashpoint," The Indian Express, May 21, 2025, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-russia-china-push-in-the-arctic-a-new-strategic-flashpoint>.

between the two countries being around 2.5 miles at its shortest.⁴ The growing relationship and cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic has continued to develop, presenting a further threat to the precarious position the alliance holds in the region.

As well, the Arctic holds immense economic potential—the U.S. Geological Survey estimated the presence of 90 billion barrels of oil, 1669 trillion cubic feet of gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids, 16 percent, 30 percent, and 38 percent of the global total, respectively.⁵ The economic potential translates beyond raw materials to Arctic shipping routes. These areas are strongly contested as they reduce voyage distance, transit time, and fuel usage as compared to traditional shipping routes, such as the Suez or Panama Canals.⁶ Both of these factors only serve to intensify competition between Arctic and near-Arctic powers to obtain access to these precious resources and routes.⁷

Moreover, the ongoing climate emergency occurring in the Arctic requires cohesive and coordinated efforts to combat. The region has been recorded to be warming four times faster than the rest of the planet, alongside retreating sea ice, thawing permafrost, and eroding coastlines.⁸ The ongoing tension between the NATO Arctic States and Russia equates to an inability to constructively work together, both on active environmental conservation efforts and on research on the ongoing effects of climate change. This ties into the cultural element of the Arctic, with many Indigenous peoples fearing that increased activity in the Arctic—whether it be for economic, scientific, or military purposes—could have severe consequences for their territories and lifestyles, particularly in terms of land usage.⁹

The multifaceted nature of Arctic affairs requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying history and background of its political tensions, and a careful approach to the various domains that can be impacted. As such, NATO's identity and presence in the Arctic are critical to address; to secure not only NATO's strategic posture, but also the future of the region itself.

Timeline

1939 — At the start of World War II (WW2), Germany develops a reliance on Swedish iron ore exports—over 50 percent of supply to its military and economic capabilities—and on Norway for its transit.¹⁰ As the economic reliance of numerous European countries on the Arctic grows, the region becomes increasingly contentious.

⁴ "Strait Connecting Pacific and Arctic Oceans Larger Than Previously Measured," NOAA Fisheries, June 6, 2023, <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/strait-connecting-pacific-and-arctic-oceans-larger-previously-measured>.

⁵ Commander Rachael Gosnell, Benjamin Jensen, "NATO and the Arctic," Center for Strategic & International Studies, July 10, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-arctic>.

⁶ Genevieve Brownlee, *Cold Calculations: Economic Prospects for Arctic Shipping Routes*, Working Paper (Middlebury Institute of International Studies, June 2024), https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/sites/default/files/2024-07/cold-calculations-arctic-shipping-routes_miis_itered-working-paper_june2024.pdf.

⁷ Julia Nesheiwat, "Why the Arctic matters," Atlantic Council, June 17, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/why-the-arctic-matters/>.

⁸ Kadin Mills, "NATO's role in the Arctic Indigenous talk," Indian Country Today, July 19, 2024, <https://ictnews.org/news/natos-role-in-the-arctic-indigenous-talk/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jen Evans, "The History and Future of Arctic State Conflict: The Arctic Institute Conflict Series," The Arctic Institute, May 25, 2021, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/the-history-and-future-of-arctic-state-conflict-the-arctic-institute-conflict-series/>.

1939-1945 — During WW2, the Arctic Theatre experiences the “Weather War”, in which the Allied and Axis powers attempt to manipulate weather patterns in order to gain military advantage in the region.¹¹

1947-1991 — The Arctic experiences high levels of militarization throughout the entirety of the Cold War, serving as a critical frontline. NATO establishes a robust defensive presence, featuring the usage of early warning systems, military bases, and surveillance efforts in an attempt to deter Soviet collusion and safeguard NATO interests in the Arctic.¹² As well, the region’s security is fundamental to secure transatlantic supply lines necessary to fuel the Western defense.¹³

1991 — The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the subsequent end of the Cold War ushers in an era of Arctic peace, marked by dialogue and collaboration in terms of security, economic interests, and environmental protection among all Arctic states. A nuclear-free zone is established in northern Europe, and confidence-building measures are extended.¹⁴

September 19, 1996 — The Arctic Council, a high-level intergovernmental forum with the purpose of enhancing cooperation, coordination, and interaction among Arctic states, is formed through the Ottawa Declaration.¹⁵ This council seeks to actively involve Arctic Indigenous peoples and other inhabitants on issues of the region.

August 2, 2007 — Russia plants its flag on the Arctic seabed, more than two and a half miles beneath the north pole, and in doing so, symbolically stakes its claim to billions of dollars worth of oil and gas reserves in the ocean.¹⁶ This claim is made on the basis that the underwater Lomonosov Ridge is directly connected to its continental shelf.¹⁷ The move is met with skepticism from other Arctic nations.¹⁸

February 24, 2022 — Russia launches a full-scale invasion on Ukraine, violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This creates larger waves, leading to the boycott and suspension of Arctic Council activities for six months, despite Russia holding the council’s rotating chairmanship.¹⁹

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Elley Donnelly, “No. 26 | NATO in the Arctic: 75 years of Security, Cooperation, and Adaptation,” Wilson Center Polar Institute, April 3, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/no-26-nato-arctic-75-years-security-cooperation-and-adaptation>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Heather Exner-Pirot, “Between Militarization and Disarmament: Constructing Peace in the Arctic,” *Arctic Yearbook 2019*, commentary, 2019, <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019/2019-commentaries/324-between-militarization-and-disarmament-constructing-peace-in-the-arctic>.

¹⁵ “The History of the Arctic Council,” Arctic Council, <https://arctic-council.org/about/timeline/>.

¹⁶ Tom Parfitt, “Russia plants flag on North Pole seabed,” *The Guardian*, August 2, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/02/russia.arctic>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gloria Dickie, Timothy Gardner, “Arctic Council in upheaval over Russia as climate change transforms region,” *Reuters*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/arctic-council-countries-halt-meetings-over-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-03-03/>.

May 18, 2022 — Finland and Sweden simultaneously hand in their official letters of application to join NATO.²⁰ Later, on April 4, 2023, Finland joins the organization, and Sweden follows on March 8, 2024.²¹ These two nations joining NATO marks seven out of the eight Arctic states being members of the alliance.

October 2024 — Russian and Chinese warships are spotted operating jointly in the Bering sea off of the coast of Alaska, demonstrating the growing relationship between the two nations.²² Rear Admiral Megan Dean, the Commander of 17th Coast Guard District declares in a statement that this activity “demonstrates the increased interest in the Arctic by [the US’s] strategic competitors.”²³

July 2025 — Russia launches the “July Storm” drill, a large naval exercise in several seas, including the Arctic sea; the exercise allegedly involves over 150 warships and 15,000 military personnel.²⁴ A few days later, NATO deploys its Standing Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1), composed of Dutch, Norwegian, Portuguese, and German vessels, to boost its maritime presence in the Arctic waters.²⁵

Historical Analysis

The history of the Arctic is marred by religious conflict and colonial violence, which resulted in the establishment of the eight Arctic states recognized today.²⁶ Early interstate conflict between these nations further influenced the foundation of the order of Arctic relations, with many of these early disputes concerning the division and management of natural resources.²⁷

Awareness of the historical context of political Arctic tensions, interwoven into every other element of Arctic affairs, is crucial in order to understand the current situation of the region and develop viable, historically conscious solutions.

World War II

The Arctic was home to immensely important shipping routes. At the Eastern front, where the USSR and Germany fought, allied supplies played a critical role in fueling Soviet efforts; American supplies to this frontline included over 400,000 vehicles, 14,000 aircraft, 13,000 tanks, 8,000 tractors, 4.5 million tons of food, 2.7 million tons of petroleum products, and millions of essential supplies such as blankets and uniforms.²⁸ In efforts to cut

²⁰ NATO, “Finland and Sweden Submit Applications to Join NATO,” news release, May 18, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Chinese and Russian coast guard ships sail through the Bering Sea together, U.S. says,” CBC News, October 2, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/chinese-russian-coast-guard-ships-bering-sea-1.7340438>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Elisabeth Gosselin-Malo, “NATO sends warships to patrol Arctic waters,” DefenseNews, August 1, 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/08/01/nato-sends-warships-to-patrol-arctic-waters/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jen Evans, “The History and Future of Arctic State Conflict: The Arctic Institute Conflict Series,” The Arctic Institute, May 25, 2021, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/the-history-and-future-of-arctic-state-conflict-the-arctic-institute-conflict-series/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

the supply line, Germany engaged in combat against Allied convoys, with the Arctic convoy PQ-18 suffering the worst loss of any convoy in WWII, during which 24 out of 35 ships sank between Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlya.²⁹

However, this region was not merely significant in terms of economic potential—it was a strategic point of WWII, which both the Axis and Allied powers fought to control. The proximity of the Arctic to Europe meant that observing its conditions could aid in weather forecasting, providing early glimpses of weather conditions that would impact Europe and the ongoing military operations occurring there.³⁰ The combating powers engaged in acts of sabotage there in attempts to impede the others' weather forecasting and to improve their own hold on the region.³¹

The Cold War

This strategic significance of the region extended beyond WWII into the Cold War, during which the Arctic served as a pivotal military theatre and frontline in the showdown between NATO and the USSR. Both the East and West had significant interests in the region, pulling their competition north. A majority of Soviet nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) were based in the Kola Peninsula, forming Moscow's second-strike capability, the ability of a nation to retaliate with nuclear weapons after being attacked, ensuring that potential attackers are deterred by the potential of guaranteed mutual destruction.³² SSBNs were utilized in northern waters, such as the Arctic Ocean, serving as operational staging areas, designated areas for personnel and equipment assembly and organization, while on deployment.³³

The USSR also utilized the Arctic as a set to showcase its technological advancements and military power, fueling the psychological component of Cold War competition.³⁴ One major example of such was its testing of the 'Tsar' bomb, one of the most powerful nuclear weapons ever detonated.³⁵ Conversely, NATO took a defensive posture, holding its sea lanes in the North Atlantic, which served as crucial naval reinforcements in the case of a showdown between NATO and the USSR.³⁶ It established a strong defensive presence in the region to dissuade any Soviet submarines or bombers that could potentially take routes through its waters, utilizing the strategic Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap for intelligence gathering and asset position.³⁷

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "The Importance of the Arctic in WWII," WWII Forum, <https://worldwariiforum.com/the-importance-of-the-arctic-in-wwii/>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Steven E. Miller, "The Return of the Strategic Arctic," Arctic Yearbook, 2022, <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2022/2022-commentaries/452-the-return-of-the-strategic-arctic>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Isolde Sylvia Hatgis-Kessel, "Cold Horizons: The Arctic's Strategic Role Then and Now," International team for the Study of Security Verona, July 8, 2024, <https://www.itssverona.it/cold-horizons-the-arctics-strategic-role-then-and-now>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Steven E. Miller, "The Return of the Strategic Arctic."

³⁷ Elley Donnelly, "No. 26 | NATO in the Arctic: 75 years of Security, Cooperation, and Adaptation,"

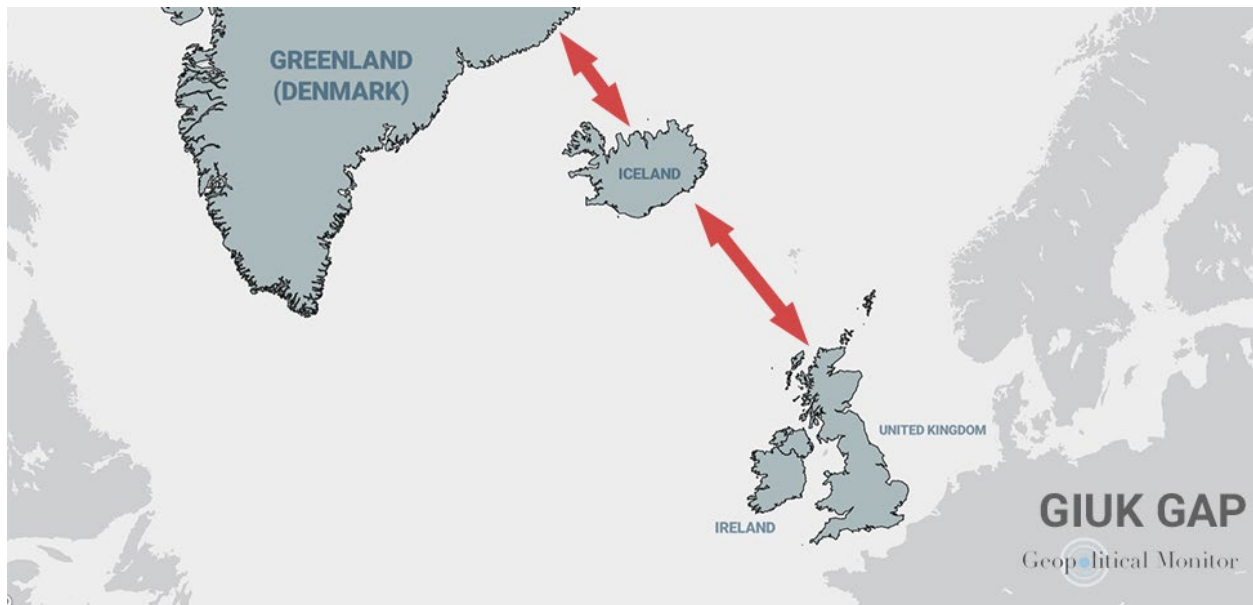


Figure 2: The GIUK Gap.³⁸

Post-USSR Development

Following the Cold War, relations between Arctic states began to warm, sparking a period of “Arctic exceptionalism,” a two-decade period of stability and cooperation in Arctic relations.³⁹ The dynamics of the region were now geared towards the cooperation and engagement of regional partners in addressing common issues; particularly those scientific, environmental, and in relation to cooperation with the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic.⁴⁰

Nations also directly aided one another, such as the West’s assistance to Russia in cleaning pollution and dumped nuclear waste, and deployment of aid to address outbreaks of tuberculosis in the north.⁴¹ This transferred into cooperation on security-related issues, with NATO members and Russia conducting joint military drills; this cooperation helped to decrease military tensions and increase political stability between the former rivals.⁴²

The atmosphere of the Arctic during this period was characterized through the Norwegian quote, “High North, Low Tension,” referring to how “soft” forms of Arctic cooperation were consistently maintained despite souring relations between nations in other areas of the world.⁴³ This was preserved despite an increasingly aggressive Russian foreign policy, evidenced by its military campaigns and aggression, such as in Georgia in 2008, or in

³⁸ Paulo Aguiar, “Geopolitics of the GIUK Gap: Past, Present, and Future,” Geopolitical Monitor, January 21, 2025, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/geopolitics-of-the-giuk-gap-past-present-and-future/>.

³⁹ Alina Bykova, “NATO has always been an Arctic Alliance (Part II),” The Arctic Institute, June 11, 2024, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/nato-arctic-alliance-part-ii/>.

⁴⁰ Elley Donnelly, “No. 26 | NATO in the Arctic: 75 years of Security, Cooperation, and Adaptation,”

⁴¹ Alina Bykova, “NATO has always been an Arctic Alliance (Part II),”

⁴² Heininen, Lassi. “The end of the post-Cold War in the Arctic.” *Nordia Geographical Publications* 40, no. 4 (2011): 31-42. <https://nordia.journal.fi/article/download/75947/37322/104986>.

⁴³ Minna Ålander, “High North, High Tension: The End of Arctic Illusions,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 11, 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/05/high-north-high-tension-the-end-of-arctic-illusions/>.

Ukraine in 2014.⁴⁴ Yet this all came to a halt following Russia's full-scale ground invasion and subsequent war with Ukraine in 2022.

Past UN/International Involvement

The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS)

The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) is a non-binding agreement between the eight Arctic states that acts as a framework for environmental protection.⁴⁵ Established in 1991 and signed by the ministers of all the Arctic countries, AEPS is structured around five programs that allow the eight nations to join forces in protecting the environment and sustainable development: namely, Sustainable Development and Utilization (SDU), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), the Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora (CAFF), Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPPR), and Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME).⁴⁶

AMAP evolved into an extensive program while each of the others became overarching categories under which specific activities take place.⁴⁷ Through the SDU, AEPS goes beyond environmental protection and branches into sustainable development; particularly, the sustainable use of renewable resources by Indigenous people.⁴⁸ The agreement fueled numerous initiatives that targeted pollution and protected biodiversity in the Arctic.⁴⁹ AEPS was considered one of the most prominent success stories of international environmental collaboration, fostering cooperation unlike before; it ultimately provided the framework for the establishment of the Arctic Council, into which its operating programs were absorbed.⁵⁰

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which came into force in 1994, is an international agreement that defines the rights and responsibilities of nations in respect to their usage of the ocean.⁵¹ It is implemented by the International Maritime Organization, the International Whaling Commission, and the International Seabed Authority, who organize, regulate, control, and authorize activities within the convention.⁵² UNCLOS is the primary foundation of legal order through which the five polar states bordering the Arctic Ocean—Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States—also known as the “Arctic Five” (A5), have the right to establish a territorial sea up to a limit of 12 nautical miles and an Exclusive Economic Zone

⁴⁴ Østhagen, Andreas. “Norway’s Arctic Policy: Still High North, Low Tension?” *The Polar Journal* 11, no. 1 (2021): 75–94. doi:10.1080/2154896X.2021.1911043.

⁴⁵ “The History of the Arctic Council,” Arctic Council, <https://arctic-council.org/about/timeline/>.

⁴⁶ Eeva Furman, “From Inspiration to Action, From Action to Institution: Some Early Interventions of Arctic Collaboration in Sustainable Development,” *Arctic Yearbook*, 2016, <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2016/2016-commentaries/186-from-inspiration-to-action-from-action-to-institution-some-early-interventions-of-arctic-collaboration-in-sustainable-development>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Fiveable, “Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS),” World Geography key-term, Fiveable, <https://fiveable.me/key-terms/world-geography/arctic-environmental-protection-strategy>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “A Quick Start Guide to the Law of the Seas in the Arctic,” The Arctic Institute, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/TAI-Quick-Start-to-UNCLOS.pdf>.

⁵² Ibid.

(EEZ) of up to 200 nautical miles.⁵³ Many of these countries intend to claim land beyond 200 nautical miles to secure access to mineral resources, in which case, they must claim an extended continental shelf by submitting evidence of the extension.⁵⁴ If approved, they will be able to exercise their rights over the land.

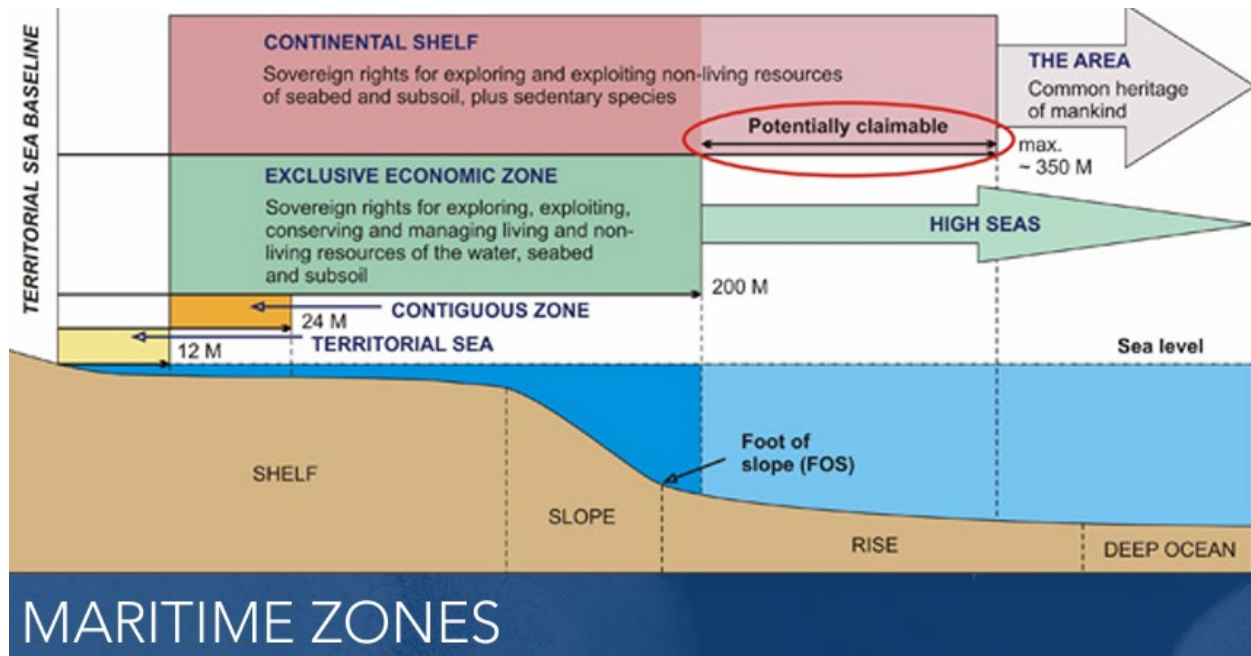


Figure 3: A diagram depicting claimable maritime zones.⁵⁵

Despite its longstanding history and the large pool of nations that have ratified UNCLOS, the U.S., one of the most powerful countries in the world, has not ratified it; this reduces the legitimacy of the convention and can feed into tensions it holds with competing nations, such as Russia and China, who have ratified it.⁵⁶

Moreover, there are several inherent issues with the convention itself such as its lack of specificity regarding the Arctic. For instance, in Article 234, it does not clearly articulate what is meant by an “ice-covered area,” which brings a myriad of issues into play: Arctic states such as Russia and Canada may interpret the wording in different ways and use it to justify their jurisdiction of waterways such as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) or the Northwest Passage (NWP), respectively.⁵⁷ This freedom in interpretation has allowed Russia to create a sense of backing as to its claims in Arctic waters, meaning that NATO must respond on the basis of UNCLOS as well.⁵⁸ This means conducting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS), making land claims, and providing countering

⁵³ “Legal order in the Arctic,” BMUKN, <https://www.bundesumweltministerium.de/en/topics/international/multilateral-cooperation/the-arctic/legal-order-in-the-arctic>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “A Quick Start Guide to the Law of the Seas in the Arctic.”

⁵⁶ Ashley Postler, “UNCLOS in the Arctic: A Treaty for Warmer Waters,” Georgetown Security Studies Review, February 24, 2020, <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2020/02/24/unclos-in-the-arctic-a-treaty-for-warmer-waters/>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mathieu Boulègue, Minna Ålander, Charlotta Collén, Edward Lucas, Catherine Sendak, and Krista Viksnins, *Up North: Confronting Arctic Insecurity — Implications for the United States and NATO* (Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, December 5, 2024), <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/up-north-confronting-arctic-insecurity-implications-for-the-united-states-and-nato/>.

interpretations of those of Russia to counterbalance it.⁵⁹ Different interpretations may also mean that non-Arctic state vessels or even those belonging to Arctic coastal states are limited in how they can enter the Arctic Ocean and maneuver in its adjacent seas.⁶⁰

Besides the concerns regarding the interpretation of the convention, climate change and the recession of ice have left many waterways in an unclear state, in which it is unknown whether they can still be defined as ice-covered.⁶¹ This also complicates how extended continental shelves can be determined, making it difficult to address current submissions for claim.⁶² The Arctic's constantly changing waters inherently clash with the static nature of UNCLOS, making it difficult for it to fully keep up with and address the Arctic's maritime delineation.

Arctic Council

Formed in 1996, the Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum with the purpose of enhancing cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic states. It actively involves Arctic Indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants in discussions on Arctic issues.⁶³

The Council was created in accordance with the values of peace and cooperation in the Arctic and holds a particular focus on sustainable development and environmental protection, much like its preceding framework.⁶⁴ All decisions made by the Council require the consensus of its eight member states and chairmanship rotates every two years among these states—currently, the Kingdom of Denmark is serving its chairmanship.⁶⁵ Additionally, there are six permanent participants, all of which are organizations advocating on behalf of Indigenous Peoples in the region: the Aleut International Association (AIA), the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), the Gwich'in Council International (GCI), the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), and the Saami Council.⁶⁶

The Council is guided by its 2021-2030 strategic plan, with the main goal of the Arctic becoming a “region of peace, stability, and constructive cooperation, that is a vibrant, prosperous, sustainable and secure home for all its inhabitants, including Indigenous Peoples, and where their rights and wellbeing are respected.”⁶⁷ The Arctic Council is the leading forum for diplomatic action in the Arctic and cooperation between the Arctic states—it has previously acted as the forum for negotiation of three important legally binding agreements among the Arctic states: the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (2011), the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (2013), and the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (2017).

However, the Council has received criticism on the basis of several aspects. It cannot implement or enforce guidelines, assessments, or recommendations on its members, meaning that there is nothing it can do if an Arctic

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ashley Postler, “UNCLOS in the Arctic: A Treaty for Warmer Waters.”

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Alina Bykova, “NATO has always been an Arctic Alliance (Part II),”

⁶⁵ “About the Arctic Council,” Arctic Council, <https://arctic-council.org/about/>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

State simply refuses to cooperate.⁶⁸ For instance, in 2019, the Arctic Council failed to release a joint statement following a ministerial meeting for the first time in history.⁶⁹ This was due to the US' refusal to take a stronger stance on climate change.⁷⁰ U.S. representatives refused to mention the Paris Agreement or recent research on climate change in the declaration and disagreed with the idea that climate change poses a major threat to the Arctic.⁷¹ Extending from this, due to the consensus-based nature of Council operations, its mandate excludes military security despite the fact that one of the most pressing issues the Arctic is currently encountering is the area's rising geopolitical tensions—it has been noted that the Council has not addressed such matters at all because it is simply not designed to do so.⁷²

Current Situation

Russian Aggression

Today, Russia has continued its expansion in the Arctic through heavy investment in military and economic strategies despite its ongoing war in Ukraine.⁷³ The specific appeal of the region for Russia is two-fold: its economic value and its strategic value. The Arctic is central to Russia's economic development due to the vast supply of energy resources in the land.⁷⁴ 80 percent of its gas production and 20 percent of its crude oil production come from the Arctic, whose resources make up 10 percent of the entire Russian GDP.⁷⁵ As well, the NSR, a maritime corridor that substantially reduces the shipping time between Europe and Asia has been opened due to the acceleration of Arctic warming, fueling Russia's motivation to operate widely across the Arctic.⁷⁶ Through this passage, Russian infrastructure has continued to move further and further North.⁷⁷

It is also a crucial location of operation militarily and strategically. The Arctic, especially the Kola Peninsula, holds key assets of Russia's second-strike nuclear capability.⁷⁸ Its powerful military presence is evident and it significantly outnumbers NATO in terms of military bases in the Arctic, being the most populated and industrialized region in the Arctic.⁷⁹ It has only continued its investment in the area, recently expanding its fleets with newly built nuclear-powered Arktika-class icebreakers capable of ploughing through ice up to 2.7 meters

⁶⁸ "About the Arctic Council,"

⁶⁹ "Arctic Council Fails to Release Joint Declaration for First Time in History Thanks to US Anti-Climate Stance," *IFLScience*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.iflscience.com/arctic-council-fails-to-release-joint-declaration-for-first-time-in-history-thanks-to-us-anticlimate-stance-52394>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "Reflections on the Past and Future of the Arctic Council," Arctic Council, May 10, 2021, <https://arctic-council.org/news/reflections-on-the-past-and-future-of-the-arctic-council/#::~:~:text=Military>.

⁷³ Allison Brown, "High North, Low Tension," Queen's University, June 10, 2024, <https://www.queensu.ca/cidp/high-north-low-tension>.

⁷⁴ Heather A. Conley, Sophie Arts, "NATO's Policy and Posture in the Arctic: Revisiting Allied Capabilities and Command Plans," *GMF*, July 5, 2023, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/natos-policy-and-posture-arctic-revisiting-allied-capabilities-and-command-plans>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Heather A. Conley, Sophie Arts, "NATO's Policy and Posture in the Arctic: Revisiting Allied Capabilities and Command Plans."

⁷⁷ Dylan Robertson, "Canada leaving 'no stone unturned' to defend Arctic alongside NATO: Anand," *Global News*, August 18, 2025, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11339839/canada-arctic-security-nato-ukraine-anand/>.

⁷⁸ Heather A. Conley, Sophie Arts, "NATO's Policy and Posture in the Arctic: Revisiting Allied Capabilities and Command Plans."

⁷⁹ Ibid.

thick and that operate year round.⁸⁰ It is also in the process of operating a fleet of over 20 nuclear and diesel-electric icebreakers that will allow it to head the search for mineral resources located in the Arctic that were previously locked under layers of ice.

In comparison, the U.S. only has three icebreakers, with one on order, and the UK has none.⁸¹ As such, Russia is able to control shipping routes and assert a powerful military dominance over the region. It has already been utilizing Arctic ports to its advantage, moving sanctioned crude oil, illegal exports that have been spotted leaving Russia's northern ports, to fund its war against Ukraine.⁸² It also serves as a strategic front, with the Arctic being the northern flank of NATO and one of the regions through which Russia can move out and towards the west.⁸³ This, alongside the tens of military bases Russia has reopened since 2005, the modernization of its navy, and development of new hypersonic missiles have set the military capabilities of NATO and Russia in the Arctic a decade apart.⁸⁴ In response, NATO has increased its presence in the Arctic through modern capabilities.⁸⁵

Chinese Expansion

With China's state leader Xi Jinping having announced China's ambition to become a major polar power, calling itself a "near-Arctic state," it has become rapidly clear that it has plans to expand into and insinuate itself into the region.⁸⁶ China has recognized not only the economic benefits that can be reaped from the region, but also the geopolitical and strategic relevance of the Arctic. New shipping routes that have opened up in the Arctic have developed faster paths between manufacturing hubs like China and Europe, cutting the distance between them by approximately 40 percent and saving millions of dollars in fuel and transit time. For instance, trips from Shanghai to Hamburg take only 15 days through the NSR, while the journey requires 30 days through the Suez Canal.⁸⁷

These plans also tie into its national strategy, with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), targeting the Arctic for its role as the "third silk road corridor," one that would allow the BRI to be expanded to new heights.⁸⁸ This new polar route would secure the national supply of fossil energy from the Russian Arctic, and would diversify its geostrategic dependence on specific Arctic waterways that could be easily blocked out in conflict. As well, the Arctic is not as highly regulated as the Antarctic, making it a good area in which China can test the limits as to how it can act.

⁸⁰ Sam Kiley, "How Russia is preparing for conflict in Nato's new Arctic battleground," *Independent*, August 15, 2025, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-russia-us-military-arctic-nato-lammy-b2806754.html>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen and Gwladys Fouche, "Russia has more Arctic military bases than NATO," *Reuters Graphics*, November 16, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ARCTIC-SECURITY/zgvobmbblrpd/>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Jim Garamone, "China Increasing Interest in Strategic Arctic Region," U.S. Department of Defense, December 5, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3986308/china-increasing-interest-in-strategic-arctic-region/>.

⁸⁷ Sam Kiley, "How Russia is preparing for conflict in Nato's new Arctic battleground."

⁸⁸ Michael Paul, "China's Arctic Turn," *SWP*, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2025C08/>.

In addition, China has been heavily involved in scientific and research-based projects in the region in an attempt to establish economic ties with the Arctic.⁸⁹ However, China's efforts to expand economically have largely been unsuccessful; these include its attempts to acquire land, seaports, airports, or associated infrastructure projects.⁹⁰ Its level of direct investment in the Russian Arctic has increased, but has not seen much growth in the non-Russian Arctic. Despite this, its efforts have not ceased, and Chinese investors who are connected to the state continue to try and buy land there.⁹¹

The growing Sino-Russian relationship has also been a major area of interest. The two nuclear-armed states, NATO's most dangerous contenders, have been cooperating and are believed to be working to take political and economic control over the Arctic.⁹² This is especially prominent in the military domain, taking joint patrols and exercises together in polar waters.⁹³ The two have also announced their plans to build ice-capable containerships.⁹⁴ The increased military presence of these allied rival countries in the Arctic has created a greater risk of territorial claims and influence, raising the potential for Arctic conflicts between NATO and their allies.⁹⁵

Environmental Concerns

The Arctic is one of the most critical regions of the world in the domain of climate change. Thousands of species call the Arctic home, several of which are near extinction due to human activity. As well, due to the fact that the region experiences polar amplification, a phenomenon where changes to climate produce more extensive changes near the poles than the planetary average, researchers can almost predict the effects of climate change.⁹⁶ One prominent example of this is the presence of ice in the Arctic. Summer sea ice levels have been shrinking by 13 percent per decade, with the sea ice cover becoming younger and thinner every year.⁹⁷ These losses are expected to increase as the global temperature rises; notably, if the global temperature increase rises to above 1.5°C, summer ice in the Arctic will be lost within decades.⁹⁸

The diminishment of Arctic sea ice is especially concerning, as the Arctic acts as a global air conditioner. The reflectivity of sea ice helps to regulate the amount of sunlight absorbed by the Earth and thus, its temperature.⁹⁹ However, the increased melting of Arctic sea ice and snow has allowed for ocean and land surface to be increasingly exposed. The ocean surface, which is much darker and less reflective, absorbs sunlight and allows more heat to enter the Arctic system. Now, a vicious cycle has been created, in which less sea ice has created more exposed ocean area, more heat absorption and accelerated climate change, thereby melting even more ice.¹⁰⁰

⁸⁹ Jim Garamone, "China Increasing Interest in Strategic Arctic Region," U.S. Department of Defense, December 5, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3986308/china-increasing-interest-in-strategic-arctic-region/>.

⁹⁰ Michael Paul. "China's Arctic Turn."

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Kadin Mills, "NATO's role in the Arctic Indigenous talk," ICT News, July 18, 2024, <https://ictnews.org/news/natos-role-in-the-arctic-indigenous-talk/>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jim Garamone, "China Increasing Interest in Strategic Arctic Region."

⁹⁵ "Why is Canada scrambling to counter Russia, China in the Arctic?" Al Jazeera, December 9, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/9/why-is-canada-scrambling-to-counter-russia-china-in-the-arctic>

⁹⁶ Julia Nesheiwat, "Why the Arctic matters," Atlantic Council, June 17, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/why-the-arctic-matters/>.

⁹⁷ "Climate Change," World Wildlife Fund, <https://www.arcticwwf.org/threats/climate-change/>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ "Climate Change."

Continued ice loss further pushes the sea level rise, potentially affecting ocean currents and the atmosphere on a global scale, with potentially devastating consequences, even for populations living away from the Arctic.¹⁰¹ Arctic glaciers and ice caps represent only 25 percent of the world's land ice area, yet melt water from them accounts for around 35 percent of the current global sea-level rise, portraying the detriment of the issue.¹⁰²

One primary example of this is the Greenland Ice Sheet, the world's second-largest repository of freshwater. The melt of this ice sheet alone will cause effects that will be felt around the world, with Greenland's ice alone having the potential to lead to a sea level rise of as much as 33 centimetres within the next century, possibly reaching a metre or more by 2200.¹⁰³

It must be considered that NATO activity, as well as that of its member states creates a significant impact on the Arctic environment. Research has found that military training exercises compact soil and erode vegetation, causing contamination and habitat loss.¹⁰⁴ It also generates noise levels exceeding known thresholds for harm to both civilians and wildlife.¹⁰⁵ Nordic militaries, such as the Norwegian military have established an approach to minimize environmental impact during military exercises.¹⁰⁶ This involves creating specific operational zones, establishing off-limit areas to protect sensitive ecosystems, and utilizing structured reimbursement procedures for any environmental harm caused.¹⁰⁷ However, further discussion on the long-term implications of Arctic military activity is necessary.

Social and Cultural Impacts

The current issues taking place in the social dimension of the Arctic cannot be neglected. The region is home to many different cultures and peoples, many of whom have resided there for millennia.¹⁰⁸ These circumpolar populations represent a wide array of human cultures, languages, histories, and religions, all of which must be preserved.¹⁰⁹ One of the primary issues facing these people right now is the loss of their natural habitats and diminished hunting ranges due to receding sea ice.¹¹⁰

There are further concerns regarding the increasing Russian activity and Chinese investments in the region and the impact they could have on the environment and the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples.¹¹¹ Arctic Indigenous

¹⁰¹ Julia Nesheiwat, "Why the Arctic matters."

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Alexandra Middleton, "Militarization of the Nordic Arctic: Demographic, Economic and Environmental Implications," *The Arctic Institute*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/militarization-nordic-arctic-demographic-economic-and-environmental-implications/>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Julia Nesheiwat, "Why the Arctic Matters," *Atlantic Council (EnergySource)*, July 22, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/why-the-arctic-matters/>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Kadin Mills, "NATO's role in the Arctic Indigenous talk."

groups have been reporting difficulty in carrying out ongoing initiatives to strengthen Indigenous rights and monitor environmental problems due to the fracturing of relations between Russia and the West.¹¹²

There has also been internal conflict amongst Indigenous communities of the North. For instance, the war in Ukraine has limited the work of the Saami Council.¹¹³ The Saami people have been split politically, with some leaders from the small Russian Saami community openly aligning with the Russian government, creating tension with the Saami in Sweden, Finland, and Norway. Yet this pushes common efforts back, preventing the Saami from working in solidarity to counter the destruction of their traditional territory; many Saami advocates on both sides feel as though decades of work in connection-building between the Russian Saami and the West have been undone overnight.¹¹⁴

The militarization of Indigenous land also results in a process akin to settler colonial land appropriation.¹¹⁵ This results in Saami people facing significant difficulties in voicing concerns regarding the expansion of military land use, noise and increased traffic due to military exercises which disrupt traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding.¹¹⁶ However, many Indigenous communities face resistance when opposing such developments, where they are framed as unpatriotic and uninformed.¹¹⁷ Accountability and transparency mechanisms must be established to ensure that the voices of local and Indigenous communities are involved in decision-making processes, particularly those that play a significant impact in traditional and day-to-day ways of life.¹¹⁸

Possible Solutions

Preparedness and Modernization

There exists a lack of robust communications infrastructure in the Arctic among allies, reducing the capabilities of units operating in the region.¹¹⁹ Maintaining command and control in the North requires a reevaluation of allied joint force command structure and responsibilities to ensure no gaps in NATO defense. To achieve this, Arctic systems must be optimized for the latitude of the North and its extreme cold, being prepared to respond to a wide array of threats such as hybrid activities that threaten critical infrastructure. For instance, there are advanced naval assets housed in the Kola Peninsula that NATO must be prepared to counter.¹²⁰ This requires training and tailored systems for NATO soldiers to be equipped to work in the Arctic, which can be improved by increasing the size and frequency of NATO's northern exercises to ensure that allied forces are able to specialize

¹¹² John Last, "The Ukraine War is Dividing Europe's Arctic Indigenous People," *Foreign Policy*, June 27, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/27/russia-ukraine-war-saami-indigenous-arctic-people-norway-sweden-finland/#cookie_message_anchor.

¹¹³ Kadin Mills, "NATO's role in the Arctic Indigenous talk."

¹¹⁴ John Last, "The Ukraine War is Dividing Europe's Arctic Indigenous People."

¹¹⁵ Alexandra Middleton, "Militarization of the Nordic Arctic: Demographic, Economic and Environmental Implications," *The Arctic Institute*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/militarization-nordic-arctic-demographic-economic-environmental-implications/>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Rachael Gosnell, Benjamin Jensen, "NATO and the Arctic," CSIS, July 10, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-arctic>.

¹²⁰ Rachael Gosnell, Benjamin Jensen, "NATO and the Arctic."

the unique skill sets they need for Arctic fighting. While there are currently some exercises and operations, such as Dynamic Mongoose and Nordic Response, they must be expanded in scope and complexity.¹²¹

However, considering the current spending crisis in NATO, member states who hold low stakes in the Arctic or do not consider it important will strongly oppose the usage of alliance-wide resources. Thus, negotiation and dialogue will be necessary if delegates wish to pursue courses of action that require large amounts of funding or investment.

Creation of an Official Defense Strategy

NATO's collective defense posture lags severely behind those of its competitors; the alliance will need at least ten years to match Russia's current regional security infrastructure.¹²² This is primarily due to its lack of a coordinated security strategy in the Arctic.

Presently, it has no formal Arctic policy, with an insufficient level of urgency and number of resources dedicated to the region corresponding to its significance. Thus, it must develop a clear strategy to strengthen the collective defense of its Northern Flank, and safeguard its interests through enhanced infrastructure, expanded patrols, and the security of critical resources.¹²³ This includes the closing of the security infrastructure gap through the expansion and enhancement of military bases or anti-missile defense systems as a priority.¹²⁴

As well, NATO may look towards increasing the airspace and naval patrolling carried out by allied forces in strategically important areas, such as the GIUK gap, to monitor and record potentially growing threats.¹²⁵ Securing critical systems, such as undersea communications and shipping routes, is also an essential component of defense in order to defend NATO's regional interests.¹²⁶

Adopting all of this under an official Arctic security policy that outlines guidance and goals in the region will secure a unified front across member states and allow for NATO's adaptation to the evolving climate of the Arctic, ultimately creating a more robust defense posture that addresses both growing challenges and the region's long-term stability.

Despite the change an official policy could bring, NATO officials have continuously refused to develop a dedicated body for Arctic activities, citing that such action would lead to regionalization in the organization, undermining its core principles.¹²⁷ This also takes into account the fact that in the status quo, there are no other

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Molly Flanagan, "NATO's Urgent Arctic Defense Strategy: Countering Russia and Securing Key Resources Amid Rising Geopolitical Tensions," American Security Project, March 14, 2025, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/natos-urgent-arctic-defense-strategy-countering-russia-and-securing-key-resources-amid-rising-geopolitical-tensions/>.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Gabriella Gricius, "NATO and the Arctic: Implications for Command and Control," NAADSN, August 20, 2024, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/24aug-NATO-Can-C2-GG-Policy-Brief.pdf>.

NATO regional working groups.¹²⁸ As well, some Arctic states may see such a move as diluting their sovereignty over the North, making a cohesive and universally agreed upon Arctic policy incredibly difficult to create and coordinate.

Safeguarding Indigenous Rights

Numerous concerns have arisen from Indigenous communities as to the exclusion of Indigenous perspectives in Arctic military and defense activity. Many fear land appropriation, the erosion of traditional livelihoods, and a lack of consultation. In order to address these rising concerns, NATO may desire the establishment of a binding protection agreement to safeguard the rights and security of Arctic Indigenous Peoples.¹²⁹

Within such an agreement, delegates may consider mandating environmental and social impact assessments on traditional Indigenous lands before infrastructure construction or troop deployment. This would focus on protecting Indigenous communities whose lands have operating grounds for NATO missions and initiatives. As well, it could grant organizations representing Arctic Indigenous peoples a consultative status in NATO Arctic activities or movement.

Environmental Protection

NATO's activity and infrastructure buildup in the Arctic brings with it environmental risks. Amidst the increased militarization of the Arctic, clear actionable steps must be taken to counter its economic implications. In practicing environmental stewardship and reconciling effective security with sustainability of the natural environment, delegates may wish to take numerous actionable steps.

For one, policy-based action could tackle issues with unsustainable energy usage. For instance, the United States' 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic advocated for a transition to green energy in an attempt to bolster environmental protection.¹³⁰ NATO could take a similar approach, moving to a policy wherein a majority of energy usage during its Arctic operations is required to be powered through sustainable energy. NATO may also find it useful to partner with environmental organizations in the Arctic. In this, it would be easier and more effective to coordinate the cleanup, removal of nuclear waste and other contamination caused by NATO activities.

Bloc Positions

Arctic States

The larger of the seven Arctic NATO states, in particular Canada and the US, are likely to support increased action in the region. This comes as the growing Chinese and Russian partnership threatens each polar state's claim on the region, posing significant security threats. Several of these nations have recently created updated

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ "Securing the Arctic: The Dilemma of Resources, Climate, and Stability," GLOBSEC commentary, September 26, 2024, <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/commentaries/securing-arctic-dilemma-resources-climate-and-stability>.

¹³⁰ Kiel Pechko, "Rising Tensions and Shifting Strategies: The Evolving Dynamics of US Grand Strategy in the Arctic," *The Arctic Institute*, January 7, 2025, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/rising-tensions-shifting-strategies-evolving-dynamics-us-grand-strategy-arctic/>.

Arctic strategies, such as Canada or the US, in order to sufficiently respond to changing threats and assert their sovereignty over the land. As each country in this bloc will feel the impact should any significant events related to climate, security, or economic gain occur, they will be willing to take a more robust role, particularly in financial investment and military exercises and training.

However, due to changing political undercurrents in NATO itself, there may be some tension between countries in this bloc and other Arctic states. Particularly between nations such as the US and Denmark, due to the former's repeated threats to annex Greenland.¹³¹ Furthermore, Canada in particular, will likely be slightly more reserved regarding a stronger alliance role in the Arctic.¹³² Yet these nations still largely hold common values and goals and thus will be willing to cooperate to achieve common goals, such as the deterrence of Sino-Russian aggression.

Nordic Arctic States

These smaller Arctic states, including Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland, are likely to heavily value NATO involvement in the Arctic due to the entirety or majority of each of their countries being within the direct Arctic. In comparison, the US, for instance, is geographically considered part of the Arctic due to the location of Alaska only.

These states likely heavily value environmental considerations. As well, the rights and protection of Arctic Indigenous communities, many of which are integral members of each of these countries' populations. Solution-wise, they will likely support solutions protecting these specific values, perhaps more so than the larger Arctic states, but also recognize the importance of military and strategic action. They will however be able to invest less, monetarily, due to their smaller economies and spending budgets.

Pro-Arctic Involvement

This bloc includes countries such as France, Germany, and the UK. While these countries may not have a hands-on role in NATO's Arctic stance, they remain stakeholders in the region and recognize the importance of the region. Thus, they are willing to contribute to Arctic based efforts.

One example of this is France's contributions to Arctic initiatives. The nation participates regularly in joint exercises in the region; this is done with the primary objectives of demonstrating support for its Arctic allies, the reaffirmation of its role in NATO, the testing of new materials and the improvement of its ability to operate in difficult environments.¹³³ Pro-Arctic Involvement states generally are conducted with a multilateral perspective, seeking to improve Arctic defense and cooperation and thus, that of the alliance.

¹³¹ Hafsa Kahlil, "Denmark and Greenland show united front against US 'annexation' threats." BBC, April 3, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cr4nlgwzy6qo>.

¹³² David Auerswalk, "NATO in the Arctic: Keep Its Role Limited, For Now," War On The Rocks, October 12, 2020

¹³³ Alix Renaudin, "France's Strategic Role in NATO's Arctic Ambitions: A Non-Arctic Power's Perspective," The Arctic Institute, November 12, 2024, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/frances-strategic-role-natos-arctic-ambitions-non-arctic-powers-perspective/>.

Anti-Arctic Involvement

While the motivations and interests of countries in this bloc vary, they are generally opposed to heavy NATO investment into the Arctic. Alliance members in Southern and Eastern Europe may see an increase in focus and investment in the Arctic as distracting and syphoning away NATO resources from security challenges in the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, Ukraine, or the Baltic Sea.¹³⁴ As well, some may hold concerns that a focus on the Arctic could aggravate Russia, pushing it to take more aggressive action and drive its expansion further to maintain its lead in Arctic establishment over NATO.

Guiding Questions

1. Should NATO expand its defensive presence in the Arctic, or should it place a greater focus on cooperation and diplomatic action? How can NATO assert protection over its member states whilst prioritizing diplomacy and cooperation?
2. How can NATO balance its spending crisis and issues of contention in other regions with its need to invest in and take further action in the Arctic?
3. What stakes and power does your country hold in the Arctic and how willing is it to take further action in the region?
4. How can NATO balance deterrence and maintaining a strong defensive front with avoiding the provocation of Russia and China? Which would be more important to prioritize, or should they be valued equally?
5. In consideration of NATO's role as a military alliance, to what extent should it focus on and consider environmental and social issues, both economically and strategically?
6. What can be done to address NATO's lack of cohesion in Arctic affairs?

Additional Resources

Report: Navigating the Melting Arctic <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2025-arctic-report-fridbertsson-022-stc>.

Article: Conflict and Geopolitical Issues in the Arctic
<https://discoveringthearctic.org.uk/governance/arctic-geopolitics/conflicts-geopolitical-issues/>.

Article: The Arctic - climate change's great economic opportunity <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2025/01/23/the-arctic-climate-changes-great-economic-opportunity>.

Report Card: Arctic Report Card - Update for 2024
<https://home.nps.gov/articles/arcticreportcard2024.htm>.

¹³⁴ David Auerswalk, "NATO in the Arctic: Keep Its Role Limited, For Now."

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<https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/08/01/nato-sends-warships-to-patrol-arctic-waters/>.
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Revisiting Nuclear Deterrence Strategies

Overview

Amid reverberating tension and unfurling turbulence, a new era of geopolitics is emerging—one poised to reshape NATO’s defense through coercion, if not by consensus. In international relations, deterrence is the threat of retaliation aimed at preventing an adversary from taking harmful action, primarily through signaling severe military consequences—a concept known as deterrence by punishment.¹³⁵ This strategy is applied via both conventional and nuclear forces. Nuclear deterrence, specifically, refers to the ability of nuclear weapons to prevent attacks by threatening devastating retaliation:¹³⁶ by maintaining nuclear arsenals, states signal their capacity to respond to aggression with certain and immediate annihilation, deterring adversaries from initiating conflict.¹³⁷

A key factor in effective deterrence is an aggressor’s certainty that they would receive retaliation, even considering the possibility of a counterattack—which risks further escalation—and the fact that the target would already have sustained significant damage from the initial strike.¹³⁸ This scenario illustrates mutually assured destruction: the understanding that an attack on a nuclear state will escalate into an exchange in which both parties face inevitable annihilation.¹³⁹ The ‘first use’ principle restricts the right to employ nuclear weapons to situations of self-defense against attacks threatening vital security interests¹⁴⁰, with strategies ranging from minimal deterrence to retaliation exceeding the aggressor’s force, or mutually assured destruction.¹⁴¹

For over 70 years, nuclear deterrence has been central to NATO’s collective defense¹⁴², in accordance with their declared commitment to “preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression.”¹⁴³ While circumstances requiring deployment of nuclear weapons are currently improbable, NATO has sworn to defend any ally under fundamental threat through both conventional and nuclear means.¹⁴⁴ This guarantee is known as NATO’s ‘nuclear umbrella,’ in which nuclear-armed states pledge to protect allied states that do not possess weapons, aiming to discourage further nuclear proliferation.¹⁴⁵

Despite NATO’s longstanding nuclear posture, tensions are beginning to brew within the alliance. Two of its core commitments conflict: while NATO supports nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, it also promises to maintain nuclear capabilities as long as other states possess comparable arsenals. As the Russian-Ukrainian war

¹³⁵ Rühle, Michael, “Deterrence: what it can (and cannot) do,” NATO Review, April 20, 2015, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2015/04/20/deterrence-what-it-can-and-cannot-do/index.html>.

¹³⁶ “Nuclear deterrence,” Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/explore-engage/key-terms/nuclear-deterrence>.

¹³⁷ “deterrence,” Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deterrence-political-and-military-strategy>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ “Nuclear Deterrence,” RAND, <https://www.rand.org/topics/nuclear-deterrence.html>.

¹⁴⁰ “Nuclear Deterrence,” Politics.co, <https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/nuclear-deterrence/>.

¹⁴¹ “Nuclear Deterrence,” RAND, <https://www.rand.org/topics/nuclear-deterrence.html>.

¹⁴² “NATO Nuclear Deterrence,” NATO, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/2/pdf/200224-factsheet-nuclear-en.pdf.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “Nuclear umbrella,” Council on Foreign Relations, https://education.cfr.org/cfr_glossary/840#:~:text=a.

continues to escalate, the alliance cannot delay resolving this contradiction in shaping their strategy for the coming years.¹⁴⁶

Simultaneously, the global nuclear landscape has introduced greater competition. With numerous countries such as China and North Korea investing to expand their nuclear arsenals, an arms race is emerging, raising the risk of destabilizing shifts in geopolitical dynamics.¹⁴⁷ The United States' dominance is jeopardized by its increasingly isolationist policies, leaving gaps in NATO's nuclear defense. Currently, the U.S. makes up over 85 percent of the alliance's nuclear capabilities¹⁴⁸, prompting European allies to consider assuming a more direct share of NATO's nuclear power, and raising questions about revising deterrence policies altogether.¹⁴⁹

Facing a nuclear world defined by uncertainty and shifting power, NATO must carefully adapt its strategy to preserve both its strength and relevance in the contemporary order. Delegates of the alliance will be tasked with recalibrating the balance between NATO's founding principles and the demands of pragmatism—ensuring that it remains united today and resilient in the face of impending upheaval.

Timeline

1947-1991 — The U.S. and Soviet Union enter a nuclear arms race in the Cold War, each manufacturing and deploying tens of thousands of nuclear weapons.¹⁵⁰ NATO makes nuclear deterrence a central element in defense efforts, recognizing that conventional weaponry can no longer compete with the potential for nuclear destruction.¹⁵¹

1993 — Following the end of the Cold War, NATO significantly reduces its nuclear presence in Europe as the Soviet Union's dissolution alleviated regional nuclear threats.¹⁵² The number of U.S. nuclear warheads stationed in Europe drops below 1,000.¹⁵³

November 19-20, 2010 — NATO adopts a new Strategic Concept and Summit Declaration outlining the future nuclear policy of the alliance.¹⁵⁴ The document affirms NATO's reliance on nuclear weaponry to maintain a powerful deterrence, yet notes its commitment to the pursuit of a world free of nuclear threats.¹⁵⁵ Deliberations

¹⁴⁶ Lambert-Deslandes, Émile, and Stéphanie von Hlatky. 2025. "NATO, Nuclear Deterrence and Disarmament in an Age of U.S. Ambivalence." *Defence Studies* 25 (3): 682–89. doi:10.1080/14702436.2025.2474061.

¹⁴⁷ Stokes, Jacob, "How Big Will China's Nuclear Arsenal Get?" CNAS, August 6, 2025, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/how-big-will-chinas-nuclear-arsenal-get#:~:text=By:%20Jacob%20Stokes,strategy%20of%20minimal%20nuclear%20deterrence>.

¹⁴⁸ "Estimated number of nuclear warheads belonging to NATO allies from 1949 to 2025," Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1294371/nato-nuclear-warhead-inventory/>.

¹⁴⁹ Graca, Jakub, Gotkowska, Justyna, "NATO's nuclear deterrence: is it time for change?" OSW, June 19, 2024, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-06-19/natos-nuclear-deterrence-it-time-change>.

¹⁵⁰ "Tactical nuclear weapons," Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/tactical-nuclear-weapon>.

¹⁵¹ Graca, Jakub, Gotkowska, Justyna, "NATO's nuclear deterrence: is it time for change?" OSW, June 19, 2024, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-06-19/natos-nuclear-deterrence-it-time-change>.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Meier, Oliver, "NATO Revises Nuclear Policy," Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010-12/nato-revises-nuclear-policy>.

¹⁵⁵ "Strategic Concept 2010," NATO, November 19, 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm.

presented disagreements between member countries regarding the need for missile defense in navigating NATO-Russia relations.¹⁵⁶

February 27, 2014 — Russia invades Crimea, leading to its full annexation on March 18, 2014.¹⁵⁷ This demonstrates Russia's willingness to take decisive military action, provoking reconsideration of nuclear deterrence strategies. In response, NATO embarks on its greatest reinforcement of collective deterrence since the end of the Cold War¹⁵⁸—in the same year, the alliance launches its Readiness Action Plan at the Wales Summit, significantly shifting NATO's defense posture.¹⁵⁹

2016 — NATO Heads of State and Government approve strengthening deterrence and defense at the Warsaw Summit.¹⁶⁰ The decision provides the alliance with increased defense options to protect NATO territory, populations, airspace, and sea lines of communication.¹⁶¹

2020 — The Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) is approved.¹⁶² The document provides a unified framework for NATO Allies to contest, deter, and defend against the alliance's threats across multi-domain environments.¹⁶³

February 2022— Russia launches a full-scale invasion on Ukraine.¹⁶⁴ This prompts allied forces to convene in Brussels, leading to the deployment of four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland—doubling the number of battlegroups on NATO's eastern flank from four to eight.¹⁶⁵

June 2022 — NATO leaders decide to bolster the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture at the Madrid Summit.¹⁶⁶ The plan includes an adjustment of balance between in-place forces and reinforcements, and the creation of a new NATO Force Model that strengthens and modernizes the NATO Force Structure.¹⁶⁷

2023 — The most comprehensive and detailed defense plans since the Cold War are approved at the Vilnius Summit—significantly improving cohesion in NATO's collective defence planning.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Walker, Nigel, "Conflict in Ukraine: A timeline (2014 - eve of 2022 invasion)," UK Parliament, August 22, 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9476/#:~:text=Russia's%20annexation%20of%20Crimea%2C%202014,status%20of%20Donetsk%20and%20Luhansk>.

¹⁵⁸ Durkalec, Jacek, "NATO Nuclear Deterrence: Its Adaptation and Changing Requirements," Center for Global Security Research, November, 2022, https://cgsr.llnl.gov/sites/cgsr/files/2024-08/NATO_Nuclear_CGSR_Annotated_Bibliography_Final.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ "Deterrence and defence," NATO, June 26, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Albuquerque, William, "More Pillars Needed: Ten Options for Europe to Improve NATO's Nuclear Deterrence," Stimson, October 2, 2024, <https://www.stimson.org/2024/more-pillars-needed-nato-nuclear-deterrence/>.

¹⁶⁵ "Deterrence and defence," NATO, June 26, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

June 24-25, 2025 — At the 2025 Hague Summit, Allied Leaders commit to a new spending goal requiring annual contributions of 5 percent from each nation's GDP on defense. Specifically, they demand at least 3.5 percent spent on core defence requirements and up to 1.5 percent on defence and security-related spending. Investments are allocated to ensure that the alliance has the infrastructure, capabilities, and forces needed to defend and deter successfully against rising powers.¹⁶⁹

Historical Analysis

NATO's deliberation on nuclear strategy began with the conception of the first atomic bomb. Since the drafting of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, the alliance has expected all allies to contribute to the defense of any member nation in the event that they are attacked.¹⁷⁰ This commitment is understood by all states as a guarantee of nuclear protection.

Arms Race in the Cold War

During their period of dominance, the Soviet Union presented both conventional and nuclear threats, creating significant pressure on NATO to integrate tactical nuclear weapons into its defensive strategy. By the end of 1960, the U.S. had deployed 2,500 tactical nuclear weapons in Western Europe; throughout the decade that followed, the alliance debated adopting the new strategy of "flexible response", which underscored their commitment to reciprocate any aggressive attack at the same level of force it was initiated.¹⁷¹ The purpose of the shift was to control escalation from non-nuclear crises, prioritizing a gradual response to avert immediate, unpredictable, large-scale conflict.¹⁷² However, NATO retained the option to use nuclear weapons in cases where their conventional response could not adequately contain the aggressor. This stance was maintained in the 1970s, and they continued to rely on deterrence from nuclear first use to prevent conventional assaults: by then, NATO's nuclear presence in Europe had grown to approximately 7,400 weapons, positioned to counterbalance the rapid advancement of Soviet nuclear technology.¹⁷³

Post-Soviet Union Dissolution Development

The dissolution of the Soviet Union shifted Europe's security environment significantly. Nuclear war no longer posed a significant threat; therefore, the economic burden of maintaining large nuclear arsenals was no longer warranted.¹⁷⁴ Since the onset of nuclear proliferation, this time period is often regarded as the most peaceful era of global military relations. In July 1990, NATO's nuclear strategy was comprehensively reviewed in the London

¹⁶⁹ "The Hague Summit Declaration," NATO, June 25, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_236705.htm.

¹⁷⁰ Mendelsohn, Jack, "NATO's Nuclear Weapons: The Rationale For 'No First Use,'" Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999-07/features/natos-nuclear-weapons-rationale-no-first-use>.

¹⁷¹ Mendelsohn, Jack, "NATO's Nuclear Weapons: The Rationale for 'No First Use,'" Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999-07/features/natos-nuclear-weapons-rationale-no-first-use>.

¹⁷² Monaghan, Sean, "Resetting NATO's Defense and Deterrence: The Sword and the Shield Redux." CSIS, June 28, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/resetting-natos-defense-and-deterrence-sword-and-shield-redux>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Declaration, where they announced a commitment to “reduced reliance on nuclear weapons” that reserved them to only the last resort.¹⁷⁵

Over 2,400 tactical nuclear weapons were retired in 1991, leaving the alliance’s arsenal standing at 4,000 warheads.¹⁷⁶ In the same year, the U.S. announced a major withdrawal of their tactical nuclear forces worldwide, leaving only hundreds of nuclear bombs in NATO’s European-based arsenal by the late 1990s. France and Britain followed by phasing out their own tactical nuclear weapons.¹⁷⁷ The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) facilitated the largest withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe, prompting both the U.S. and Russia to reduce national stocks in response.¹⁷⁸ While the United States reduced its non-strategic nuclear forces, it remains inconclusive as to whether Russia fully implemented the commitment.¹⁷⁹

Despite significant reductions of nuclear warheads, NATO continued to cement its identity as a nuclear alliance. Despite calls for denuclearisation aimed at several countries, including Germany, nuclear weapons remained deployed. Notably, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton affirmed in 2010 that “as a nuclear alliance, sharing nuclear risks and responsibilities widely [was] fundamental.”¹⁸⁰

Past UN/International Involvement

Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) and the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG)

The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) introduced a series of policies pertaining to the U.S. and Russia in 1991, enabling the most large-scale reduction of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in European theatre.¹⁸¹ Following their establishment, the U.S. destroyed approximately 2,000 ground-launched nuclear artillery shells and short-range ballistic missiles; removed all TNWs from naval surface ships, attack submarines, and naval aircraft; destroyed all nuclear depth bombs; de-alerted strategic bombers; and cancelled the planned modernization of certain nuclear systems.¹⁸²

However, PNIs were “reciprocal unilateral commitments,” meaning they were not legally binding and non-verifiable.¹⁸³ As signatories were not subject to international treaty law, both the U.S. or Russia could have withdrawn their pledge without notifying the other party.¹⁸⁴ The lack of verification and data exchange mechanisms caused widespread speculation that the USSR has understated the strength of their nuclear arsenal,

¹⁷⁵ Mendelsohn, Jack, “NATO’s Nuclear Weapons: The Rationale for ‘No First Use,’” Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999-07/features/natos-nuclear-weapons-rationale-no-first-use>.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Cox, Jessica, “Nuclear deterrence today,” NATO Review, June 8, 2020, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/06/08/nuclear-deterrence-today/index.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Corin, Eli, “Presidential Nuclear Initiatives: An Alternative Paradigm for Arms Control,” NTI, February 29, 2004, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/presidential-nuclear-initiatives/>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

or pulled out altogether.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, despite their controversy, PNIs made a noteworthy impact on disarmament and non-proliferation, withdrawing an estimated 17,000 TNWs from service.¹⁸⁶

Simultaneously, in December 1966, NATO moved to found the Nuclear Planning Groups (NPGs). The NPG acts as a senior body over nuclear affairs within NATO, and is tasked with deliberating specific policies such as arms control.¹⁸⁷ With the exception of France, every NATO ally state is represented as a member.¹⁸⁸ The group consistently reviews NATO's regulations and strategy, and coordinates adaptations in response to new developments—operating an indispensable position in shaping the alliance's nuclear policy.¹⁸⁹ Currently, the NPG has advocated to prioritize nuclear deterrence over defense through consultation. However, due to the sensitive nature of its discussions, little information regarding their recent initiatives are disclosed to the public.¹⁹⁰

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is an international landmark treaty: it aims to contain the global development of nuclear weapons and weapon technology; promote cooperative and peaceful uses of nuclear energy; and ultimately, support the goal of complete nuclear disarmament.¹⁹¹ As the most ratified arms limitation agreement in history, the NPT is the cornerstone of global nuclear non-proliferation.¹⁹² A total of 191 states have ratified the treaty, including the five official NWS—China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S..¹⁹³

Currently, the NPT is also the only multilateral treaty that holds nuclear-weapon states (NWS) with a binding commitment to disarmament.¹⁹⁴ The treaty entrusts the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with the key responsibility of enforcing verifications.¹⁹⁵ Specifically, Article 3 of the NPT required non-NWS to conduct comprehensive safeguard agreements with the IAEA, which enables it to verify the extent to which their obligations are fulfilled.¹⁹⁶

The NPT has led various global successes. It helped several states abandon their nuclear ambitions, and effectively limited the acquisition of materials and technology required in nuclear weaponry construction.¹⁹⁷ For instance, South Africa and Ukraine were deterred from nuclearization; additionally, the entirety of South America is nuclear-free.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁵ Corin, Eli, "Presidential Nuclear Initiatives: An Alternative Paradigm for Arms Control," NTI, February 29, 2004, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/presidential-nuclear-initiatives/>.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ "Nuclear Planning Group (NPG)," NATO, May 9, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50069.htm.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Sayle, Timothy Andrews. 2020. "A Nuclear Education: The Origins of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43 (6–7): 920–56. doi:10.1080/01402390.2020.1818560.

¹⁹¹ "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," United Nations, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt/>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ "Q&A: Pros and cons of the NPT," BBC News, May 3, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4491003.stm>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

However, the NPT has received reasonable criticism: it holds no control over states that refuse to join the treaty or choose to withdraw when convenient. India, Israel, and Pakistan, countries known to possess nuclear weapons, have not signed the treaty, and are unchecked to develop nuclear arsenals however they wish.¹⁹⁹ Other countries, such as Iran and North Korea, have developed nuclear capabilities while retaining NPT membership—which led to North Korea’s eventual withdrawal.²⁰⁰ Further, the NPT allows nations to justify nuclear fuel production for purposes relating to energy generation, which enables the potential for misuse.²⁰¹ Simultaneously, NATO’s own nuclear states continue to modernize and expand their own nuclear arsenals, and have deployed nuclear weapons on the territories of non-nuclear allies—undermining disarmament obligations set by the NPT.²⁰² Overall, NATO remains limited in its ability to take meaningful strides towards disarmament, as states posing the greatest nuclear threats are most challenging to monitor.

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a legally binding, comprehensive set of prohibitions on participation in any nuclear weapon activities.²⁰³ The treaty was adopted by the UN on July 7, 2017, and entered into force on January 22, 2021.²⁰⁴ These include undertakings not to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use, or threaten to use nuclear weapons.²⁰⁵ The treaty also prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any state in the conduct of prohibited activities.²⁰⁶ Further, state parties are obligated to provide assistance to any individuals or areas impacted by the use and testing of nuclear weapons.²⁰⁷

It is a far more ambitious endeavour towards disarmament and non-proliferation compared to the NPT, and has been met with resistance. While the NPT allows the NWS to possess nuclear weapons, the TPNW attempts to ban both the usage and possession of them.²⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly, all NWS refused to join and actively opposed negotiation.²⁰⁹ This stance was also taken by the ‘non-NPT NWS,’ such as North Korea, India, Israel, and Pakistan.²¹⁰

Further, as they are protected by the alliance’s nuclear umbrella, NATO members did not join the treaty.²¹¹ While many ally states do not possess nuclear weapons, they rely on the U.S. nuclear deterrent, as well as that of France

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Jaramillo, Cesar, “Deliver of Collapse: Five Critical Challenges for an NPT under Strain,” Ploughshares, April 29, 2025, <https://ploughshares.ca/deliver-or-collapse-five-critical-challenges-for-an-npt-under-strain/>

²⁰³ “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” United Nations, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Trezza, Carlo, “The new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: pros and cons,” NATO Defense College Foundation, January 2021, <https://www.natofoundation.org/food/the-new-treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons-pros-and-cons-carlo-trezza/>.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Trezza, “New Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.”

²¹¹ Ibid.

and the UK to a lesser extent.²¹² Many also host U.S. nuclear weapons on their territory. This is not forbidden by the NPT, but is explicitly prohibited by the new treaty. As such, no NATO state has ratified or signed the agreement, with many openly opposing and declining the invitation to participate in its negotiation, despite Article 6 establishing it as an obligation; only the Netherlands participated in negotiations.²¹³

Ultimately, TPNW negotiations only took place between like-minded countries, creating its fatal flaw. No NWS or NWS allies nor states capable of producing nuclear weapons, such as South Africa and Mexico, have joined the treaty, meaning that it has minimal impact on the disarmament scene.²¹⁴

Current Situation

NATO's current nuclear deterrence strategy is based on its 2022 Strategic Concept and 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, as well as guidance from Heads of State and Government at NATO summits.²¹⁵ This policy branches out into the three categories of strategic nuclear forces, nuclear sharing arrangements and dual-capable aircraft, and exercises.²¹⁶ Strategic nuclear forces are the guarantee of NATO's security. They are made up of U.S. nuclear weaponry, while the UK and France possess their own independent strategic nuclear forces that also play a deterrent role.²¹⁷ This strategy is based on the belief that, through having separate centers of decision-making, the calculations of any potential adversaries will be complicated, thereby contributing to deterrence.²¹⁸ As such, when adversaries attack, they must contend with the decision-making of NATO as an organization, as well as that of the U.S., UK, and France.²¹⁹

There are also nuclear sharing arrangements and dual-capable aircraft in Europe. These are based on the U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, and the infrastructure capacity of the allies hosting them—supplemented by dual-capable aircraft (DCA).²²⁰ Allies must remain available for nuclear roles at various levels of readiness and are equipped to carry nuclear weapons in conflict with personnel trained accordingly. However, the U.S. always maintains absolute control and custody of these nuclear weapons.²²¹ Nuclear sharing arrangements play a vital role in the interconnection of the alliance, acting as one of the main components of the alliance's security guarantee and the unbreakable security of the entire Euro-Atlantic.²²²

However, there exists criticism that NATO's nuclear deterrent is not prepared to counter adversaries in Europe, let alone the rest of the world.²²³ In particular, there have long been contradictions and strategic inconsistencies

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ "NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces," NATO, June 24, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ "NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces," NATO, June 24, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Kamp, Karl-Heinz, "Nuclear NATO: how to make it credible and efficient," NATO Defense College, January 2025, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/nuclear-nato-how-to-make-it-credible-and-efficient/?wpdmdl=5836&refresh=68b424cdec8601756636365>.

affecting the weapon arsenal and strategic justification found in NATO documents.²²⁴ While the alliance was able to largely ignore these for decades, Russia's invasion on Ukraine acted as a snap back to reality.

The primary issue with the deterrent strategy is that it is simply outdated. For instance, NATO's deterrent is largely made up of American B61 bombs, free-falling bombs that must be transported by aircraft, but when used, are easily exposed to enemy air defence, and become extremely vulnerable.²²⁵ There are other plausible options, such as the American Trident submarine-launched missiles, some of which carry warheads possessing very low explosive power; however, the nuclear armoury has not been updated accordingly.²²⁶ While there may have been improvements in nuclear arms and procedures, there are still major flaws with the current strategic document of 2022 that takes a detailed stance on deterrence but fails to define the steps needed to keep deterrence effective and credible—making the precise execution of modernization unclear.

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons in Europe has decreased by around 90 percent, driven by the goal of disarmament and non-proliferation and in line with NATO's commitment to the non-proliferation treaty²²⁷. Between 2000 and 2010, the United States continued to reduce the number of nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, consolidating them at fewer bases—this limited posture has remained the same up until the ramp-up of Russian aggression which shattered any hopes for disarmament. However, there remains the internal conflict, whenever discussing matters related to nuclear deterrence, as to whether or not NATO should pursue disarmament or deterrence, long-term, more strongly.

Within NATO, there exists an overlooked group: nuclear-dependent states that advocate for disarmament and place emphasis on their decision to forego nuclear weapons.²²⁸ Such states exist in a grey zone in which they support disarmament on a level of principle, yet simultaneously endorse and benefit from nuclear deterrence policies, such as existing under NATO's nuclear umbrella.²²⁹ Some such nations even participate directly in nuclear planning groups and embed nuclear weapons in their security strategies.²³⁰ This contradiction weakens the legitimacy of nuclear-dependent states as actors in the disarmament movement.²³¹ One such example of a NATO state that exemplifies this dynamic is Canada.²³² Canada frequently emphasizes its commitment to disarmament but at the same time, endorses policies that prioritize nuclear deterrence.²³³

Foreign Nuclear Threat

NATO has acted in response to Russia's unlawful war against Ukraine, strengthening its long-term deterrence and defence posture and developing a full range of ready forces and capabilities necessary for credible deterrence

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Jaramillo, Cesar, "The Enablers: How Nuclear-Dependent States Hinder Nuclear Disarmament," Centre for International Policy Studies," December 9, 2024, <https://www.cips-cepi.ca/2024/12/09/the-enablers-how-nuclear-dependent-states-hinder-nuclear-disarmament/>.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

and defense.²³⁴ The alliance has publicly declared that “any use of nuclear weapons by Russia would fundamentally change the nature of the war, and it would have severe consequences for Russia.” Yet Russia’s own nuclear deterrent has been a shaping force in NATO’s involvement in the war, the primary reason for which NATO has refrained from direct military intervention. The fear of nuclear escalation has shaped Western policy, for better or for worse, and leaves the allies with an inability to act beyond fiscal support and maintaining awareness by bolstering its own forces and armoury.²³⁵ This war only confirmed that the nuclear threat and reality that Russia presents are inescapable and must be confronted by the alliance. However, Russia is not the only threat—it has been steadily increasing its ties with other nuclear states; primarily China, North Korea, and Iran, pose a severe threat to NATO if entered into the nuclear equation.

China in particular has been expanding its nuclear arsenal, thereby complicating the NATO deterrence strategy that was originally primarily geared towards Russia.²³⁶ This is a shift from its previous minimalist nuclear force posture. Some estimates suggest that by the end of the decade, the Chinese nuclear arsenal is expected to grow beyond 1000 operational nuclear warheads, supplemented by advanced delivery systems.²³⁷ This has led NATO’s NWS to consider whether its current posture is truly fit for the future, as the new layer of multipolarity has made deterrence decision-making and signaling more complicated and difficult.²³⁸

Governments such as Iran and North Korea also pose a significant nuclear threat. Iran has increasingly restricted the IAEA from accessing key nuclear facilities, and has suspended formal discussion with the agency.²³⁹ Iran and North Korea have also been actively aiding Russia in the war effort. North Korea in particular has been receiving missile technology for its aid. The two states have become increasingly unpredictable and have been noted to be directly sharing scientific expertise and data with Russia and China whilst permitting the transfer of key nuclear-related equipment and materials through both state-owned and private companies.²⁴⁰ These cooperative proliferation efforts have allowed the members of this “Axis of Aggressors” to make greater progress on their nuclear programs and arsenals, posing a significant threat to NATO’s nuclear development which has progressed at a much slower and restricted rate.²⁴¹

As well, NATO must consider theatre-level, not just strategic-level nuclear deterrence, as actors in the Indo-Pacific region develop.²⁴² To survive this combined nuclear threat from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, NATO must ensure its nuclear deterrence strategy is not only more credible, but robust, survivable, and diversified, not merely considering the ‘what-if’ but also the ‘when’.

²³⁴ Regehr, Ernie, “Updating NATO’s Strategic Concept: The Nuclear Imperatives,” The Simons Foundation Canada, May 4, 2022, <https://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/highlights/updated-natos-strategic-concept-nuclear-imperatives>.

²³⁵ Lavikainen, Jyri, “Nuclear deterrence in the Ukraine war: Diplomacy of violence,” Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February, 2023, <https://fiia.fi/en/publication/nuclear-deterrence-in-the-ukraine-war#:~:text=Russia's>

²³⁶ “Mattelaer, Alexander, “China’s Nuclear Shadow Reaches Europe,” RUSI, October 8, 2024, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/chinas-nuclear-shadow-reaches-europe>.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Whisnant, Gabe, “NATO Countries Threaten Iran Over Nuclear Program,” Newsweek, August 13, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/nuclear-war-program-threat-nato-countries-iran-sanctions-2113137>.

²⁴⁰ Stricker, Andrew, “Nuclear Cooperation Among the ‘Axis of Aggressors’: An Emerging Threat,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, June 13, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/06/13/nuclear-cooperation-among-the-axis-of-aggressors-an-emerging-threat/>.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

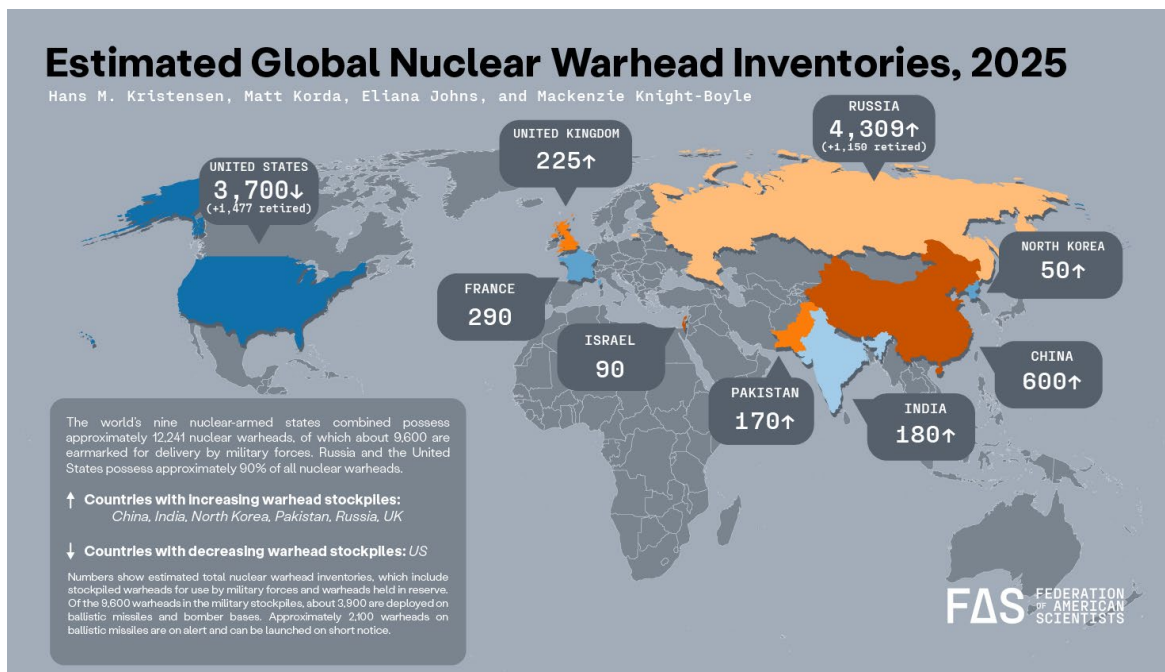


Figure 1: Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories as of 2025.²⁴³

Internal Alliance Tensions

Apart from increasing tensions with opposing countries, NATO must also consider the tension occurring within the alliance. During the U.S. President Donald Trump's second term, he has made frequent criticisms of NATO allies for not fulfilling burden sharing requirements whilst relying on the U.S. for a security guarantee.²⁴⁴ Under Trump, the U.S. has grown far more aggressive and stubborn on this, as well as on nuclear advancement. For instance, its new nuclear posture review will result in the procurement of new types of nuclear weaponry to increase the flexibility of nuclear employment options and emphasizes the concept of maintaining a balance between maintaining a secure and effective nuclear deterrent and taking necessary steps to reduce the risk of nuclear war.²⁴⁵ This has created tension between allies, reducing the overall cohesiveness of the deterrence front. However, allies have recently agreed to switch the previous 2 percent spending requirement to a 5 percent spending requirement, demonstrating that it is very much possible for NATO states to be more flexible and willing to negotiate in order to remain under the powerful U.S. nuclear umbrella. Despite the tensions that exist between Trump and other NATO leaders—with the former claiming the alliance to be “freeloaders” surviving off of U.S. protection on numerous occasions—member states have recognized the U.S.'s vitality to the alliance's nuclear umbrella.²⁴⁶ Dr. Frakas, the executive director at McCain Institute, described the situation as such: “The reality is Trump is dangerous to the alliance in that America is still the strongest economic, political, military power and NATO is stronger if NATO has the United States inside the alliance.”²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Kristensen, Hans, Korda, Matt, Johns, Eliana, Knight-Boyle, Mackenzie, Kohn, Kate, “Status Of World Nuclear Forces,” March 26, 2025, <https://fas.org/initiative/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

²⁴⁴ Kamp, Karl-Heinz, “Nuclear NATO: how to make it credible and efficient,” NATO Defense College, January 2025, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/nuclear-nato-how-to-make-it-credible-and-efficient/?wpdmdl=5836&refresh=68b424cdec8601756636365>.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Bateman, Tom, “US allies try to ‘Trump-proof’ Nato - but is that even possible?” BBC, July 12, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3gr90jnxjvo>.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Diversifying Nuclear Posture

The evolving security situation in Europe requires a strengthening of NATO's nuclear deterrent. This means a flexible nuclear response that signals a credible deterrent capability at all stages of escalation of a potential conflict.²⁴⁸ As such, NATO must have a broader range of non-strategic nuclear weapons; to achieve this, the U.S. could deploy additional types of nuclear weapons in Europe in addition to the already stored bombs.²⁴⁹ For instance, the deployment of ground-launched tomahawk cruise missiles: they have ranges of 1,600 kilometers, mobile launch pads, no fixed targets, and penetration capabilities higher than those of aircraft.²⁵⁰ This will not only provide NATO with a less vulnerable and more reliable nuclear response but also sends a message to Russia that NATO's nuclear deterrent remains strong and will continue to develop.²⁵¹ This could pose the risk of sparking protests in the countries these weapons are being deployed in, but these would likely be minimal; this is evidenced through the reaction received when the German government decided to deploy tomahawks.

Yet the nuclear threat extends beyond Europe, encompassing China, North Korea, and Iran. With this widespread threat, the gap between the U.S. and other allies may create a vulnerability that can be exploited; China currently has a large, diversified, and fully survivable nuclear arsenal that NATO must compete with.²⁵² The alliance's nuclear posture must become more robust, survivable, and diversified across numerous theaters. Thus, it could extend its deterrence relationships in the Indo-Pacific, which require theater-level nuclear weapons.²⁵³ In order to maintain a close watch on non-European adversaries, particularly China, North Korea, and Iran, partnerships promoting information sharing and awareness could significantly aid in intelligence-based strategies.

As well, the posture should be diversified on an operational basis. This means expanding the scenarios allied forces train for and ensuring decision makers understand the timelines, risks, and consequences of nuclear weapons.²⁵⁴ Exercises should be simulating the political complexity of nuclear decision-making, not just the technical execution, to reduce any ambiguity, improve crisis management, and ensure NATO can respond coherently to any threat that arises.²⁵⁵ However, this may be difficult for Indo-Pacific allies to follow-through with, as many of them lack the infrastructure necessary to contribute to wide-spread nuclear deterrence; this includes not only manpower but also the necessary training and capacity. Delegates must consider the public sensitivities and the capacity of non-NATO allies, carefully securing consensus among allies and ensuring that any kind of action towards diversification is backed with careful crisis management and communication strategies to minimize unnecessary escalation.

²⁴⁸ Kamp, Karl-Heinz, "Nuclear NATO: how to make it credible and efficient," NATO Defense College, January 2025, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/nuclear-nato-how-to-make-it-credible-and-efficient/?wpdmdl=5836&refresh=68b424cdec8601756636365>.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Nagy, Tomáš A, "From Assurance to Resilience: Adapting NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Policy," GLOBSEC, May 2025, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/From%20Assurance%20to%20Resilience%20-%20Adapting%20NATO%E2%80%99s%20Nuclear%20Deterrence%20Policy.pdf>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Modernization

NATO's current nuclear power relies on a small number of dual-capable aircraft delivering gravity bombs, reflecting the legacy of the Cold War.²⁵⁶ Yet these are no longer fit for use when taking into account the ramping up of tensions internationally, increasing the risk of nuclear conflict. This is where the F-35A could come into play, offering a technical boost to NATO nuclear sharing arrangements.²⁵⁷ As the technology utilized by competing nations grows progressively more advanced, NATO must keep up should it wish to maintain its credible deterrent. The dual-capable fighter capability should also be supplemented with at least one other theater nuclear capability. For instance, sea-launched cruise missiles that are nuclear-armed would provide the necessary attributes.²⁵⁸

However, in plans for incoming years, there do not seem to be any major increases in anticipated nuclear warhead numbers. As such, delegates may wish to focus on improving the resilience, survivability, and readiness of existing assets. This includes the hardening of infrastructure, enhanced command and control, and diversified delivery systems. Conventional allied forces, especially high-end capabilities such as air defence, long-range fires, and electronic warfare, also contribute to the broader deterrent effect and must therefore be treated as important to NATO's posture.

Communication and Credibility

As the concept of deterrence hinges upon a perceived willingness to act, NATO must ensure that it presents a credible front that is capable of defending against powerful adversaries. The best course of action to address this would be to improve its in-alliance communication and its public and foreign perception.²⁵⁹ This can be done by strengthening its political-military links, updating nuclear planning and exercise practices that reflect today's strategic landscape, and ensuring regular scenario-based engagement of senior civilian and military leadership.²⁶⁰ There must also be an increase in public and private communication and cooperation on nuclear deterrence.²⁶¹

However, care must be taken in order to ensure that strategic ambiguity, as well as strategic literacy, is maintained. Targeted communication can help in this, to prevent misperceptions, bolster deterrence, and strengthen the societal resilience of NATO ally countries.²⁶² Circumspection is also an important factor, as there is a line between deterrence and provocation, one which the alliance must be careful not to cross, especially considering the aggressive nature of Russia. It is crucial to consider the impact that enhanced nuclear posturing could have, and delegates must take care to avoid too great an escalation that could potentially spark further conflict.

²⁵⁶ Nagy, Tomáš A, "From Assurance to Resilience: Adapting NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Policy," GLOBSEC, May 2025, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/From%20Assurance%20to%20Resilience%20-%20Adapting%20NATO%E2%80%99s%20Nuclear%20Deterrence%20Policy.pdf>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Nagy, Tomáš A, "From Assurance to Resilience: Adapting NATO's Nuclear Deterrence Policy," GLOBSEC, May 2025, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/From%20Assurance%20to%20Resilience%20-%20Adapting%20NATO%E2%80%99s%20Nuclear%20Deterrence%20Policy.pdf>.

Nuclear literacy also plays an important role in this. Across NATO, for both the civilian population and allied soldiers, there has been an erosion of nuclear-related knowledge for several reasons: generational change, political discomfort, and the legacy of post-Cold War disarmament norms.²⁶³ This knowledge gap not only weakens deterrence but also impairs decision-making, reducing the quality of political-military dialogue, increasing the risk of miscommunication in a crisis.²⁶⁴ As such, NATO may look toward investing in nuclear literacy as a part of its deterrence strategy. This might include professional development for policymakers and senior officials, structured nuclear education in military curriculum, and regular engagement with expert communities.²⁶⁵ However, the impact of this approach may not be as great as that of other approaches, meaning that education must be used in tandem with other operational and strategic solutions.

Addressing Internal Disagreements

Beyond modernization, shifts in strategy, and the creation of new alliances, NATO must solidify its united stance on the concept of nuclear deterrence. This requires the alliance to address the ongoing internal conflict regarding disarmament versus deterrence. Delegates may choose to address this through a variety of methods. Internal forums for discussion would be the most direct way to address the current disparities in nuclear stance between individual states. Dialogue regarding differences in stances is necessary first and foremost to solidify ally stances and eliminate the pre-existing gray zone that many NATO allies currently occupy. Eventually, this would create a formal strategy and unified stance that would not only increase internal cohesion, but also the legitimacy of NATO's nuclear deterrent.

It is important to note, however, that the concept of addressing alliance contradictions is somewhat abstract. Delegates will need to lay out specific measures through which this can be done in order to ensure that it leads to any change in the alliance's internal dynamic.

Bloc Positions

Nuclear Weapon States

Composed of the U.S., UK, and France, these countries are the only NATO members that possess nuclear weaponry. The U.S. and UK play a prominent role in the alliance's nuclear policy and nuclear weapon-sharing, and provide strong contributions to the alliance's nuclear umbrella and security guarantees. These two countries participate in the NPG and are likely to support solutions advocating for the modernization and further deployment of nuclear arms in Europe. However, France is more so an outlier: it is not a participant in the NPG, maintaining autonomy in nuclear policy and arsenal.²⁶⁶ However, it has expressed interest in extending its nuclear umbrella to help protect other European states.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Messmer, Marion, Cournoyer, Julia, "France should join NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements to strengthen European deterrence," Chatham House, March 12, 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/france-should-join-natos-nuclear-sharing-arrangements-strengthen-european-deterrence>.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Pro-Deterrence, Nuclear Sharing States

Some allies in this bloc, such as Germany, Italy, and Turkey, currently have nuclear weaponry deployed on their territory.²⁶⁸ These countries actively participate in NATO nuclear activities and in the NPG. They will likely be open to the modernization of nuclear equipment and are more likely to agree to demands from the NWS states to maintain strategic stability and positive alliance relations to maintain their nuclear weapon stocks.²⁶⁹ Other nations in this bloc who do not host nuclear weapons but endorse deterrence heavily, such as Poland, Estonia, or Romania, also participate in the NPG and related nuclear exercises.²⁷⁰ Due to their willingness to participate in nuclear endeavours and modernize equipment, they will entertain a wide variety of solutions and will be more flexible depending on how severe they perceive the threat.²⁷¹

States Considering Disarmament

Nations in this bloc, such as Belgium, Canada, and the Netherlands, do not necessarily oppose the usage of nuclear weaponry, but take a slightly more liberal stance on the humanitarian side of nuclear usage, such as disarmament.²⁷² They have engaged or participated in discussions regarding the disarmament and may take into consideration factors such as environmental impacts.²⁷³ Despite sympathy towards disarmament efforts, these states do not support disarmament in the status quo and believe in maintaining U.S. nuclear-sharing until necessary.²⁷⁴

Discussion Questions

1. What role does your country play in deterrence efforts?
2. What adjustments should be made to current deterrence strategies to adapt to the changing security environment?
3. How can NATO modernize its nuclear capabilities whilst keeping in mind the current spending issues within the alliance?
4. How can proper deterrence and credibility be achieved without provoking adversaries?
5. What action can be taken to address rising nuclear powers, particularly in the Indo-Pacific?

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²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Lambert-Deslandes, Émile, and Stéphanie von Hlatky. 2025. “NATO, Nuclear Deterrence and Disarmament in an Age of U.S. Ambivalence.” *Defence Studies* 25 (3): 682–89. doi:10.1080/14702436.2025.2474061.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

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