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Issue Brief

2026 NPT Review Conference: Debates about Nuclear-Sharing

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S*ummary*

While nuclear sharing arrangements remove the incentive for NNWS to develop nuclear weapons, thus complementing the non-proliferation objectives of the NPT, the very fact that nuclear weapons have been considered in the security calculus of nations runs contrary to the objective of nuclear disarmament.

In its 2026 National Report to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference (RevCon), Russia expressed concerns about the ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangements in Europe. Russia stated that “nuclear sharing with the broad participation of non-nuclear member States” in Europe was one of the factors that negatively impacted strategic stability and posed a national security threat to Russia.¹ The reference to the ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangement was missing in Russia’s 2020 National Report to the NPT RevCon. Ironically, Russia has also stationed its nuclear arsenal in neighbouring Belarus, despite criticising Europe’s ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangements.²

Although debate over the ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangement is not new and has occurred at previous RevCons, the issue surfaced in the statements of several countries at the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 11th NPT RevCon. Moreover, the issue gained traction amid major structural changes in Europe regarding ‘nuclear sharing’ since 2025. Therefore, as the international community closely watches developments at the 2026 NPT RevCon, ‘nuclear sharing’ is expected to be a topic of discussion.³

Structural Changes in Europe

The United States (US) nuclear umbrella has been the bedrock of North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) security architecture in Europe for years, and the US has binding commitments to defend European allies. However, the US 2026 National Defence Strategy made it clear that the US expected the European countries to take responsibility for European security “with critical but more limited support from the US”.⁴ US President Donald Trump has disparaged NATO and considered withdrawing from it on several occasions.⁵ Even the US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, stated that the US would have to re-examine its relationship with NATO after several European countries denied the US access to their bases during the ongoing Iran War.

The US administration’s stance towards NATO has dented the US’s credibility and its commitments to extend nuclear deterrence to its allies. Thus, France and the

¹ [“National Report of the Russian Federation to the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”](#), United Nations, 2 March 2026.

² Jack Detsch and Robbie Gramer, [“Russia’s Nuclear Weapons Are Now in Belarus”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 14 March 2024.

³ Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, [“Key Issues for the 2026 NPT Review Conference”](#), Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, April 2026.

⁴ [“2026 National Defence Strategy”](#), US Department of War, 23 January 2026.

⁵ Connor Stringer, [“Trump Interview: I am Strongly Considering Pulling Out of Nato”](#), *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2026.

United Kingdom (UK) are taking steps towards having an independent European nuclear deterrent, alongside the NATO nuclear mission. France declared the policy of ‘Forward Deterrence’ in March 2026, in response to the Russian security threat to Europe, growing cooperation among Russia, China and North Korea, and the fledgling US commitments to NATO.⁶

The policy opened the door for European allies to participate in French deterrence exercises and temporarily deploy elements of the French strategic air force to allied countries.⁷ This would help the French strategic air force maintain a presence deep within European territory, creating doubts in the adversary's mind.⁸ The non-nuclear European nations participating in this initiative are Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark, alongside Germany and the UK. However, the decision to employ the nuclear weapon would solely remain with the French President.

Before the announcement of the ‘Forward Deterrence’ policy, France and the UK announced a resolute commitment to nuclear cooperation under the Northwood Declaration in July 2025.⁹ In a joint statement, they affirmed the inseparability of their individual security from broader European security. Thus, they decided to coordinate their individual nuclear forces for “the peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area”.¹⁰ They established a UK–France Nuclear Steering Group to provide political direction for implementing the Northwood Declaration, with its first meeting held in Paris in December 2025.¹¹ The French Nuclear exercise Operation Poker, held in September 2025, was attended by foreign officials, including those from the UK.¹²

In March 2026, France and Germany entered into close cooperation in the field of deterrence by establishing a high-ranking nuclear steering group for “doctrinal dialogue and the coordination of strategic cooperation, including consultations regarding the appropriate mix of conventional, missile defence and French nuclear

⁶ [“President Delivers Speech on France's Nuclear Deterrence”](#), France in the United Kingdom, Republic of France, 4 March 2026.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [“Northwood Declaration: UK-France Joint Nuclear Statement”](#), the United Kingdom Government, 10 July 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [“New UK-France Nuclear Steering Group Meets in Paris”](#), France in the United Kingdom, 22 December 2025.

¹² [“The French Nuclear Deterrent Expands Eastward”](#), IISS, March 2026.

capabilities”.¹³ As a first step, it was decided that German conventional forces would participate in the French nuclear exercises, and there would be joint visits to strategic sites. The joint declaration made it clear that Franco-German cooperation would be in addition to NATO’s nuclear-sharing agreement, not a substitute for it. Interestingly, all these declarations made clear that they continued to comply with their NPT obligations.

Additionally, the UK and France also decided to increase their nuclear arsenal. According to the ‘Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’, the UK reversed its earlier pledge to reduce the number of nuclear warheads from 225 to 180 by the mid-2020s and instead decided to increase it to 260.¹⁴ Similarly, even France decided to increase its nuclear arsenal and refrain from releasing figures on it, as was the practice in the past, to create ambiguity in the adversary’s mind.¹⁵ Thus, Europe saw significant structural changes in the nuclear realm: the pursuit of Europe’s independent nuclear deterrent and an increase in the number of nuclear warheads held by France and the UK.

Nuclear-Sharing Debate

The 2026 National Report of Russia to the NPT RevCon claimed that the inclusion of non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) in NATO’s ‘nuclear sharing’ arrangements has enabled the US to station its nuclear weapons at places in Europe from where it is easy to attack Russia. Similarly, a “radical deepening of coordination among European nuclear States” to establish “a common European nuclear capability to supplement the nuclear umbrella of the US” has also been cited as a destabilising factor from Russia’s security perspective.¹⁶ The National Report, further, took exception to the US ‘extended deterrence’ in the Indo-Pacific, “with a tendency towards establishing a tripartite ‘nuclear alliance’ between the United States, South Korea and Japan.”¹⁷

G.M. Gatilov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the UN Office and other international organisations in Geneva, in an interview on 24 March 2026,

¹³ [“Joint Declaration of President Macron and Chancellor Merz”](#), the French Government, 2 March 2026.

¹⁴ [“Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy”](#), Government of the United Kingdom, March 2021.

¹⁵ [“President Delivers Speech on France’s Nuclear Deterrence”](#), no. 6.

¹⁶ [“National Report of the Russian Federation to the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”](#), no. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

contended that the French were expanding the geographic scope of joint nuclear missions, in addition to NATO’s nuclear-sharing arrangements in the region. When combined with the nuclear developments taking place in the UK, the threat perception for Russia was arising from Europe, as the nuclear buildup could conduct coordinated attacks on Russia.¹⁸

China supported Russia’s stance regarding ‘nuclear-sharing’ in its Working Paper titled ‘Give Full Play to the Role of the NPT in Promoting Peace and Development in the New Era’,¹⁹ submitted to the United Nations (UN) during the Third Session of the PrepCom for the 2026 NPT RevCon. It asked countries involved in the ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangements and ‘extended deterrence’ to be more transparent and reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national doctrines. Further, it counselled countries not to enter into new nuclear-sharing arrangements or upgrade existing ones. Moreover, it asked the nuclear-weapon states (NWS) to remove their nuclear weapons deployed overseas.²⁰ China differentiated itself from other NWS in the National Report submitted to the 2026 NPT RevCon by claiming that it did not provide a nuclear umbrella to other countries.

A Chinese think-tank, China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, came up with a report titled ‘Analysis of the Incompatibility of NATO’s Nuclear Sharing Arrangements with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons’, on the evening of the second session of the PrepCom for the 11th NPT Review Conference in July 2024.²¹ It showed that NATO’s nuclear-sharing arrangement was incompatible with the NPT regime and violated Articles I and II of the Treaty. The report framed the definition of ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangement as an instrument which allows “the US to conditionally transfer its control over nuclear weapons to certain non-nuclear-weapon NATO members in wartime and to help in peacetime those countries to develop and acquire the ability to take over such control in wartime”.²² However, the NATO ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangement keeps ultimate control over the nuclear arsenal in the hands of the US President.

¹⁸ [“G.M. Gatilov's Answers to Questions from the Izvestia Information Centre”](#), Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and other international organisations in Geneva, 24 March 2026.

¹⁹ [“Give Full Play to the Role of the NPT in Promoting Peace and Development in the New Era”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China, 25 April 2025.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ [“Analysis of the Incompatibility of NATO’s Nuclear Sharing Arrangements with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”](#), China Arms Control and Disarmament Association and China Institute of Nuclear Industry Strategy, July 2024.

²² Ibid.

In a statement to the First PrepCom for the 11th NPT RevCon in July–August 2023, Egypt took a critical stance regarding states providing a nuclear umbrella and those covered by it. It stated that NWS, by forming partnerships and alliances, poses a serious threat to the NPT regime. Further, the NNWS under a nuclear umbrella could not be viewed as fully complying with the Treaty either, given the NPT's preamble, which affirms that the Treaty's goal was to ensure the security of “all peoples” and not only “some peoples”.²³

South Africa, in a statement to the Second PrepCom to the 11th NPT RevCon in July 2024, raised questions regarding the commitment of the states providing a nuclear umbrella and those protected by it to nuclear disarmament. It further stated that the deployment of nuclear weapons on the territories of the NNWS was incompatible with the spirit and objectives, if not the letter, of the Treaty.²⁴ It urged the NWS and NNWS engaged in nuclear sharing arrangements to work towards total nuclear disarmament.

In a statement to the Second PrepCom to the 11th NPT RevCon in July 2024, Brazil expressed grave concern regarding extended nuclear deterrence arrangements and claimed that such arrangements ‘not only undermine the spirit and objectives of the NPT but also increase the risk of conflict’.²⁵ Such initiatives hinder nuclear disarmament and encourage nuclear proliferation. The Working Paper submitted by the Group of Non-Aligned States Parties to NPT PrepCom in April 2025 also claimed that practices like ‘nuclear-sharing’ arrangements or extended deterrence ‘run contrary to the principles and objectives of the Treaty’.²⁶

However, Reports submitted by the US and the Netherlands to the NPT RevCon 2026 mentioned nuclear-sharing arrangements or extended deterrence commitments as complementing the NPT's aims in the non-proliferation domain. The US considered its extended deterrence commitments to support ‘the NPT non-proliferation goals by reducing incentives to pursue nuclear weapons’,²⁷ rather than as ultra vires of the NPT obligations. Similarly, the Netherlands, a NATO member state, believed that the

²³ [“Statement by the Delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt”](#), The 1st Preparatory Committee for the 11th NPT Review Conference, Vienna, July–August 2023.

²⁴ [“Statement of the Republic of South Africa”](#), The 2nd Preparatory Committee for the 11th NPT Review Conference, Vienna, 22 July 2024.

²⁵ [“Statement of Brazil”](#), The 2nd Preparatory Committee for the 11th NPT Review Conference, Vienna, July–August 2024.

²⁶ [“Working Paper Submitted by the Members of the Group of Non-Aligned States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”](#), United Nations, 1 April 2025.

²⁷ [“National Report of the United States of America to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”](#), United Nations, 24 April 2026.

nuclear-sharing arrangements were consistent with its NPT obligations.²⁸ Therefore, an intense debate regarding nuclear-sharing arrangements continues, with nations advocating for and against them. This discourse is expected to extend into the current NPT RevCon.

Conclusion

While nuclear sharing arrangements remove the incentive for NNWS to develop nuclear weapons, thus complementing the non-proliferation objectives of the NPT, the very fact that nuclear weapons have been considered in the security calculus of nations runs contrary to the objective of nuclear disarmament. Moreover, some countries view ‘nuclear-sharing’ as a move encouraging proliferation and increasing the risk of war. Nuclear-sharing may not technically breach the NPT in its explicit terms, but it undoubtedly contravenes its spirit. It is intriguing to observe the developments occurring at the ongoing 2026 NPT RevCon and to follow the discussions surrounding it.

²⁸ [“Implementation of the Action Plan of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Previous Review Conference Outcomes by the Kingdom of the Netherlands”](#), United Nations, 3 March 2026.

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