

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN NATO'S NUCLEAR PRIORITIES

NATO's new Strategic Concept highlights areas of change and continuity in nuclear priorities. These priorities will be driven by a combination of global and domestic political factors. In this article, I argue that the continued threat posed by Russia, the growth of the anti-nuclear movement in Europe, the rise of China, and the emergence of new nuclear technologies will drive NATO nuclear priorities for the foreseeable future. Russian aggression drives continuity in NATO nuclear priorities, as Russia has been, and will remain, the primary threat to NATO security. Meanwhile, the other factors will combine to force changes to NATO nuclear priorities and policies.

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Nuclear weapons play an important role in NATO strategy. Multiple policy documents state that NATO is a nuclear alliance that relies on nuclear and conventional capabilities to ensure the security of its members.¹ There has been significant continuity in the role that nuclear weapons play in NATO doctrine, although the collapse of the Soviet Union did result in changes to NATO force structure in the 1990s and early 2000s.² Moving forward, NATO's nuclear priorities will continue to see much continuity. However, the changing strategic environment, in Europe and globally, will cause important changes in NATO nuclear priorities.

This article will discuss how NATO's nuclear priorities will change, and how they will remain the same, in the near to mid-future. The article will look at the impact of four trends on NATO's nuclear priorities and policies: the reemergence of Russian aggression in and around Europe, increasing support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the rise of China, and the emergence of new nuclear technologies. I argue that Russian aggression will drive a degree of continuity in NATO nuclear priorities, while the other factors will force changes to NATO's nuclear priorities and policies.

The rest of this article will focus on these trends and their impact on the change or continuity of NATO priorities and policies. The next section will discuss the threat of Russia. The third section will discuss the impacts of the growing pro-TPNW and anti-nuclear movements on NATO nuclear policies. The fourth section will discuss how the rise of China will change NATO nuclear priorities. The fifth section will explore potential responses to the emergence of new nuclear technologies. Finally, the sixth section will conclude the article by discussing factors that could limit or increase the impacts of these trends.

Russian Aggression and Nuclear Continuity

Russia's war in Ukraine has already changed NATO. Sweden and Finland are joining the alliance in response to the growing Russian threat in Northern Europe.³ NATO members are deploying more troops to its eastern flank.⁴ And many analysts have argued that Putin's aggression in 2014 and 2022 has given NATO two gifts: a purpose

¹ For examples, see "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 29 June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>; "Active Engagement, Modern Defence," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 19 November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm?selectedLocale=en

² "Final Communique: Meeting of the Defence Planning Committee in Ministerial Session," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 13 June 1996, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25064.htm?selectedLocale=en

³ Michael Claesson and Zebulun Carlander, *How Sweden and Finland Can Bolster NATO*, War on the Rocks, 19 July 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/how-sweden-and-finland-can-bolster-nato/>

⁴ *Allies Stand Together to Bolster NATO's Eastern Flank*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 10 May 2022, https://ac.nato.int/archive/2022/nato_eAV_air

for existence in the 21st century and greater solidarity among NATO members.⁵

While increasing Russian aggression over the past decade has changed NATO policies and priorities, it will not significantly change NATO's nuclear priorities. Rather, by forcing NATO to remain focused on the threat posed by Russia, Russian aggression will ensure a level of continuity in NATO nuclear priorities. The threat of Russian nuclear weapons and nuclear modernization has been mentioned in multiple strategic documents.⁶ Most recently, the 2022 Strategic Concept depicted Russia as the principal threat to allied security.⁷ The Strategic Concept highlights Russia's modernization of its nuclear arsenal and its use of nuclear weapons for coercive signaling as threats to European and Transatlantic security. Earlier in 2022, NATO released its most recent Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Defense Policy, which cites Russia as "the most pressing CBRN security challenge facing NATO."⁸

“Anti-nuclear movements may continue to gain strength among the general population and elected leaders of hosting states, posing a challenge for NATO nuclear sharing.”

Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the use of non-kinetic measures to increase discontent in NATO member states, and the modernization of Russia's nuclear arsenal guarantee that Russia will remain NATO's primary nuclear priority for the foreseeable future. NATO has already developed strategies to deter Russian aggression against NATO members. NATO members rely on the security provided by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. The independent nuclear arsenals of the United Kingdom and France contribute to NATO's ability to deter Russian aggression. And the forward deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye is intended to deter a Russian attack against NATO members and to increase NATO capabilities should a regional war emerge.⁹

⁵ Steven Erlanger, *Fear of Russia Brings New Purpose and Unity to NATO, Once Again*, New York Times, 14 January 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/14/world/europe/nato-russia-ukraine-europe.html>; Thomas Graham, *NATO Countries Signal Resolve at Summit: What Does It Mean for Russia?*, Council on Foreign Relations, 30 June 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/nato-countries-signal-resolve-summit-what-does-it-mean-russia>

⁶ For example, the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept: North Atlantic Treaty Organization 19 November 2010.

⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization 29 June 2022.

⁸ "NATO's Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Defence Policy," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 14 June 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_197768.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁹ This article does not seek to examine the efficacy of nuclear sharing, although other scholars have. For example, see Todd S. Sechser, *Sharing the Bomb: How Foreign Nuclear Deployments Shape Nonproliferation and Deterrence*, The Nonproliferation Review, Vol. 23, No. 3-4 (2016): p. 443-458.

Each of these above strategies will be continued by NATO into the near and mid-future. However, Russian aggression is not the only trend impacting NATO nuclear priorities. NATO will seek to maintain its nuclear capabilities while dealing with increasing political pressures in NATO member states, including those hosting nuclear weapons, to support disarmament and oppose the deployment of U.S. nuclear forces in Europe. The next section will discuss the impact of pro-TPNW and anti-nuclear movements on the future of NATO nuclear policies.

Disarmament, Anti-Nuclear Movements, and Future NATO Nuclear Policy

TPNW has support from anti-nuclear NGOs and the governments of several non-nuclear states. The treaty required ratification from 50 United Nations members to enter into force. On 24 October 2020, Honduras became the 50th member to deposit its ratification documents with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, allowing the treaty to enter into force in January 2021, although no nuclear armed state has signed the treaty.¹⁰

The Netherlands participated in the TPNW negotiations, while both the Netherlands and Germany participated in the TPNW Meeting of State Parties as observers in June 2022.¹¹ Neither country has signed the treaty and the Dutch government has explicitly stated that they will not do so as long as NATO is a nuclear alliance.¹² However, the participation of both governments in the Meeting of State Parties is a reflection of growing anti-nuclear sentiment in each state. Multiple Dutch political parties have supported disarmament and opposed the hosting of nuclear weapons.¹³ Members of both the Social Democratic Party and Green Party in Germany have publicly supported TPNW and opposed the hosting of U.S. nuclear weapons on German soil.¹⁴ And the public of both countries are increasingly anti-nuclear.¹⁵ Germany and the Netherlands are not alone. Belgium and Italy, which also host U.S.

¹⁰ Jan Eliasson and Dan Smith, *The 50th ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 26 October 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/expert-comment/2020/50th-ratification-treaty-prohibition-nuclear-weapons>

¹¹ “Following parliament’s vote, Netherlands will attend TPNW MSP,” ICAN, 18 June 2022, https://www.icanw.org/netherlands_tpnw_msp

¹² Michal Onderco, et.al., *When do the Dutch Want to Join the Nuclear Ban Treaty? Findings of a Public Opinion Survey in the Netherlands*, The Nonproliferation Review, Forthcoming.

¹³ Wilbert van der Zeijden, *A Dutch Revolt? The Salience of the Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons Issue in Dutch Politics*, European Security, Vol. 23, No. 1: p. 45-57.

¹⁴ Julia Berghofer, *With Its First Three-Party Coalition, Where’s Germany’s Defence and Security Policy Heading?* European Leadership Network, 25 November 2021, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/with-its-first-three-party-coalition-where-germanys-defence-and-security-policy-heading/>; Ronja Ganster, *Germany’s New Government Settles the Nuclear Debate – For Now*, German Marshall Fund, 12 November 2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/germanys-new-government-settles-nuclear-debate-now>

¹⁵ Michal Onderc and Michal Smetana, *German Views on US Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Public and Elite Perspectives*, European Security, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2021), 630-648.

nuclear weapons, have seen an increase in anti-nuclear sentiment.¹⁶

Increasing support for disarmament and opposition to hosting U.S. nuclear weapons has not translated into anti-hosting policies in these member states.¹⁷ But there is no guarantee that the inability of the anti-nuclear movement to generate anti-hosting policies will continue. Anti-nuclear movements may continue to gain strength among the general population and elected leaders of hosting states, posing a challenge for NATO nuclear sharing.

“One factor that is increasing the threat of both Russia and China is the modernization of their nuclear arsenals and the emergence of novel technologies. The potential proliferation of these technologies to rogue states such as North Korea and Iran also poses a threat to NATO.”

If U.S. nuclear weapons are evicted from the Netherlands, Germany, or another hosting country, American and NATO leaders will likely seek to find new hosts. Potential new hosts include countries in Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, and Sweden and Finland. Poland has expressed interest in hosting U.S. nuclear weapons, an interest that predates Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.¹⁸ The United States and NATO have refrained from deploying U.S. nuclear weapons in countries such as Poland or Romania to prevent provoking Russia and to adhere to the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.¹⁹ Concerns regarding possible escalation of tensions with Russia caused by the forward deployment of nuclear weapons to NATO's Eastern Flank, could prevent such a deployment in the future, although that is not a certain outcome. The United Kingdom has hosted U.S. nuclear weapons before and has its own nuclear capability. Deploying weapons to the United Kingdom is less likely to

¹⁶ Ludovica Castelli, *Italy and the Nuclear Ban Treaty: A Hesitant Opening?* Istituto Affari Internazionali, 16 June 2022, <https://www.iai.it/it/publicazioni/italy-and-nuclear-ban-treaty-hesitant-opening>; Gabriela Galindo, *Belgium Narrowly Rejects Removal of US Nuclear Weapons*, The Brussels Times, 17 January 2020, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/90143/removal-of-us-nuclear-weapons-from-belgium-narrowly-rejected-by-lawmakers-nato-kleine-broegel-deterant-tpnw-un-npt-nuclear-heads>

¹⁷ Stefanie von Hlatky, *Transatlantic Cooperation, Alliance Politics and Extended Deterrence: European Perceptions of Nuclear Weapons*, *European Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014), 1-14.

¹⁸ Aaron Allen, *The Ongoing German-Polish NATO Nuclear Sharing Nexus*, *New Eastern Europe*, 1 July 2021, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/07/01/the-ongoing-german-polish-nato-nuclear-sharing-nexus/>

¹⁹ Steven Pifer, *US Nukes in Poland Are a Truly Bad Idea*, Brookings Institution, 18 May 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/05/18/us-nukes-in-poland-are-a-truly-bad-idea/>

cause or escalate a crisis with Russia and would be met with limited opposition from the British public. Finally, Sweden and Finland have not ruled out the possibility of hosting U.S. nuclear weapons, although it is unlikely that nuclear weapons will be deployed in either country in the near future.²⁰

The need to find new nuclear hosts may not materialize. However, growing support for the anti-nuclear movement is not the only force that may cause changes in NATO nuclear priorities and policy. The rise of China, coupled with its growing partnership with Russia, will force NATO to change its nuclear priorities. These changes are the subject of the next section.

NATO Nuclear Priorities and Deterring a Rising China

NATO leaders perceive China as a threat to Transatlantic, European, and Arctic security. While the United States and China have engaged in an increasingly tense rivalry for decades, the Chinese threat had not figured into the strategic thinking of NATO.²¹ This has changed. The 2022 Strategic Concept names China as a major threat, the first time that China has been mentioned by a NATO Strategic Concept.²² According to the Strategic Concept, China's threat is primarily related to increasing Chinese assertiveness in space, cyber domains, and China's growing partnership with Russia.²³ Both the Strategic Concept and the 2022 CBRN Policy also highlight the threat posed by the modernization and expansion of China's nuclear arsenal.²⁴

The perception of a Chinese threat will increase. China and Russia will continue to build closer ties in the wake of the Ukraine War, as Russia needs access to Chinese markets and technology to offset the impacts of Western sanctions.²⁵ China is also increasing its presence in the Arctic, a region crucial to the alliance.²⁶ China is also increasing its investment in parts of the Middle East and Africa, bringing it greater influence in regions of strategic importance for NATO's European members.²⁷

²⁰ *NATO Does Not Plan Nuclear Arms or Bases in Finland, PM Tells Paper*, Reuters, 19 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/no-nuclear-arms-or-nato-bases-finlands-soil-pm-tells-paper-2022-05-19/>; Jens Petersson, *As Sweden Gets Ready for NATO, Will Its Approach to Nuclear Weapons Change?* Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 27 July 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/2022/07/as-sweden-gets-ready-for-nato-will-its-approach-to-nuclear-weapons-change/>

²¹ Bill Hayton, *NATO Knows Asia is Vital to Protecting Global Security*, Chatham House, 28 June 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/06/nato-knows-asia-vital-protecting-global-security>

²² North Atlantic Treaty Organization 29 June 2022.

²³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization 29 June 2022.

²⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization 29 June 2022; North Atlantic Treaty Organization 14 June 2022.

²⁵ David O. Shullman and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, *Best and Bosom Friends: Why China-Russia Ties Will Deepen after Russia's War on Ukraine*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 22 June 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/best-and-bosom-friends-why-china-russia-ties-will-deepen-after-russias-war-ukraine>

²⁶ SannaKopra, *China and its Arctic Trajectories: The Arctic Institute's China Series 2022*, The Arctic Institute, 17 March 2020, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-arctic-trajectories-the-arctic-institute-china-series-2020/>

²⁷ Dawn C. Murphy, *China's Rise in the Global South: The Middle East, Africa, and Beijing's Alternative World Order* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

NATO will need to consider the increasing threat of China for the foreseeable future. NATO's primary tool for addressing this threat will continue to be the U.S. nuclear arsenal. France and Britain will also play an increasing role in NATO's competition with China; and French and British conventional capabilities would enhance NATO's capabilities in the Pacific, a region beyond NATO's traditional region of interest. Both the British and French have already shown an interest in increasing their capabilities in the South Pacific.²⁸

The American, British, and French navies will likely deploy attack submarines in larger numbers in the Pacific. These submarines could counter Chinese ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). All three could also increase the number of their own SSBNs deployed to the region, a step the United States is already expected to take. Other NATO members could contribute to missions in either the Pacific or Arctic. While these other states do not possess nuclear weapons, their conventional submarine, surface ship, and naval aviation forces could be used to track Chinese SSBNs or even engage with them in the event of a conflict between NATO members and China.

Finally, NATO will increasingly engage with non-NATO partners in the region. The Madrid Summit saw the participation of potential Pacific partners for the first time.²⁹ The partners already engaging with NATO include Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.³⁰ In addition to the participation of these Pacific partners during the Madrid Summit, the United States, United Kingdom, and France have increased their individual engagement with Indo-Pacific partners. The United States and United Kingdom formed a new security agreement—AUKUS—with Australia in 2021. The United States has increasingly engaged with Japan, India, and Australia through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. And the United States, United Kingdom, and France have increased their arms trade with India over the past decade.³¹ Recent sanctions on Russia may also lead to increasing arms engagement between India and Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, and Romania, as each could sell replacement parts

²⁸ David Camroux, *AUKUS: Why Britain Was the Big Winner*, *The Diplomat*, 2 December 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/aucus-why-britain-was-the-big-winner/>; Frederic Grare, *France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power*, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 21 October 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/france-other-in-do-pacific-power-pub-83000>

²⁹ Hayton (2021).

³⁰ Mirna Galic, *Despite Ukraine Focus, Asia-Pacific to Play Prominent Role at NATO Summit*, *United States Institute of Peace*, 27 June 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/despite-ukraine-focus-asia-pacific-play-prominent-role-nato-summit>

³¹ Manu Pubby, *France Gains as Indian Arms Imports From Russia Drop*, *The Economic Times*, 15 March 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/france-gains-as-indian-arms-imports-from-russia-drop/article-show/90209989.cms?from=mdr>; Ashok Sharma, *India to Boost Arms Output, Fearing Shortfall from Russia*, *ABC News*, 7 April 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/india-boost-arms-output-fearing-shortfall-russia-83927635#:~:text=NEW%20DELHI%20%2D%2D%20India%20on,from%20its%20main%20supplier%20Russia>

for Soviet-era equipment operated by the Indian military.³²

One factor that is increasing the threat of both Russia and China is the modernization of their nuclear arsenals and the emergence of novel technologies. The potential proliferation of these technologies to rogue states such as North Korea and Iran also poses a threat to NATO. The next section will address how these technologies will change NATO nuclear priorities and policies.

NATO's Response to Novel Nuclear Technologies

On 1 March 2018, Vladimir Putin announced the development of several novel nuclear weapons systems.³³ Several of these systems were not only new to Russia, but would be the first of their kind developed anywhere. Two of these systems, *Kinzhal* hypersonic air-launched cruise missile and the Avangard HGV, have already been deployed.³⁴ Another, *Tsirkon* hypersonic cruise missile, will enter mass production by the end of 2022.³⁵ Two additional Russian weapons, the *Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon unmanned underwater vehicle, are still in the testing stage.*³⁶

Russia is not the only NATO adversary developing new nuclear technologies. China is currently developing and testing its own nuclear-capable HGV.³⁷ North Korea and Iran, both of which are mentioned as potential threats to the security of NATO members in the 2022 Strategic Concept and CBRN Defense Policy, may also develop hypersonic weapons.³⁸ North Korea is currently testing what it claims is a hypersonic missile, while Iran has conducted research on hypersonic weapons.³⁹

These weapons are better able to penetrate missile defenses. NATO members have a few options for responding to the development of these new technologies. First,

³² Vasabjit Banerjee and Benjamin Tkach, 2022, *Helping India Replace Russia in the Value Arms Market*, War on the Rocks, 20 May 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/helping-india-replace-russia-in-the-value-arms-market/>

³³ Vladimir Putin, *Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly*, Office of the President of Russia, 1 March 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>

³⁴ Akshai Vikram, *Russia's New Nuclear Weapons: Understanding Avangard, Kinzhal, and Tsirkon*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2 August 2021, <https://nuclearenetwork.csis.org/russias-new-nuclear-weapons-understanding-avangard-kinzhal-and-tsirkon/>

³⁵ *Tsirkon Hypersonic Missile Enters the Final Stage of State Trials*, Naval News, 21 January 2022, <https://www.naval-news.com/naval-news/2022/01/tsirkon-hypersonic-missile-enters-the-final-stage-of-state-trials/>

³⁶ Amy F. Woolf, *Russia's Nuclear Weapons: Doctrine, Forces, and Modernization*, Congressional Research Service, 21 April 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R45861.pdf>

³⁷ Sidarth Kaushal and Sam Cranny-Evans, *China's New Hypersonic Capability*, RUSI, 26 October 2021, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/chinas-new-hypersonic-capability>

³⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization 29 June 2022; North Atlantic Treaty Organization 14 June 2022.

³⁹ Kelley M. Saylor, *Hypersonic weapons: Background and issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, 5 May 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/weapons/R45811.pdf>

they may develop new defense systems that are better able to counter hypersonic weapons. Second, NATO members may seek to maintain nuclear deterrence by modernizing and expanding their own nuclear arsenals, guaranteeing the ability to do unacceptable damage in response to a nuclear attack. Third, NATO members may attempt to engage Russia, China, and others in arms control negotiations intended to limit the deployment of hypersonic or other new weapons. Finally, NATO members may choose to ignore the development and deployment of these weapons altogether.

The most likely responses will be developing new missile defense capabilities and modernizing nuclear arsenals. The United States is pursuing both strategies, developing new technologies of their own and attempting to develop systems capable of countering hypersonic weapons.⁴⁰ If developed, these advanced missile defense would likely be deployed to Europe, similar to the current deployment of Aegis ashore systems in Poland and Romania.

Conclusion

These four trends are driving, and likely will continue to drive, change and keep the continuity in NATO's nuclear policies. Russia's aggression, combined with its nuclear modernization, ensure that it will be the top priority for NATO nuclear doctrine in the foreseeable future, while the increasing threat from China, emerging nuclear technologies in the hands of potential adversaries, and growing power of the anti-nuclear movement in Europe will force some change in NATO's nuclear priorities. This section will conclude by discussing what additional factors may limit the influence of these trends.

The Russian threat is likely to remain. However, certain factors could make it more or less dangerous. Russia could withdraw from the remaining arms control agreements that limit the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the United States. This would pose a serious threat to NATO and would force NATO members, including the United States, to consider how to manage an impending arms race between the Washington and Moscow. Alternatively, Russian leaders could decide to reduce the threat posed by the Russian nuclear arsenal and engage in good-faith negotiations to limit emerging nuclear technologies or revive the INF Treaty, although it is unlikely that this will happen.

Similarly, the threat of China could increase or decrease. Increasing Chinese

⁴⁰ Shannon Bugos, *U.S. Rushes Hypersonic Development*, Arms Control Today, 1 June 2022, [https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3028518/dod-focused-on-hypersonic-missile-defense-development-admiral-says/](https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-06/news/us-rushes-hypersonic-development#:~:text=The%20Hypersonic%20Air%2DBreathing%20Weapon,Martin%20as%20the%20prime%20contractors; David Vergon, <i>DOD Focused on Hypersonic Missile Defense Development, Admiral Says</i>, U.S. Department of Defense, 11 May 2022, <a href=)

belligerence in the South China Sea or the Straits of Taiwan could risk a China-United States crisis, a crisis that could result in a China-NATO confrontation. The threat posed by China could be reduced by future arms control agreements that include limits on the Chinese arsenal. These agreements may also include France and the United Kingdom. Additionally, China and Russia could compete over interests in the Arctic, Central Asia, and Northeast Asia, creating a rift in their relationship and limiting the threat of a China-Russia axis.

Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran may be unable to fully develop the novel systems they are currently pursuing. Technological issues, testing problems, and increasing costs could make these programs unappealing. Additionally, Iran may not cross the nuclear threshold, although Iranian proliferation appears increasingly likely given the inability of negotiators to revive the Iran Nuclear Deal, limiting the threat posed by new systems to a conventional threat.

Finally, economic issues, social issues, or climate issues may distract from the hosting of nuclear weapons. This may result in anti-nuclear parties ignoring the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. Alternatively, anti-nuclear voters may vote for pro-nuclear parties due to agreements on other policies.