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# Nuclear Poland—no longer an unattainable goal



Poland is no newcomer when it comes to hosting nuclear weapons. In the 1960s, the Soviet Union stationed several missiles with nuclear warheads in Poland; in the following two decades, the Soviet nuclear arsenal continued to be stored in purpose-built depots in Poland. In 1991, Poland announced that it would curtail the nuclear potential of its then-ally.

Today, there is a consensus in Poland to re-join the circle of armies with nuclear potential. Although President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Donald Tusk are political opponents, they share the same view about the need for Poland to have a nuclear arsenal on its territory.

The purpose is different today than it was during the Cold War. The threat that Poland wants to fend off today comes from Russia, a former ally.

"This defensive tactic is a vital response to Russia's behaviour, relocating nuclear weapons in the NATO area. Poland is ready to host this nuclear weapon," President Duda **told** the BBC this week.

In 2022, President Duda also appealed to then President Joe Biden for the USA to station part of its nuclear arsenal in Poland, partly to deter the Russian military threat.

This appeal was not met with enthusiasm in the White House, as Joe Biden's administration was careful not to provoke a new Russian escalation with its steps during the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

## Political consensus

President Duda is now reiterating this request to the Trump administration, expressing his belief that "it would be safer if those weapons were already [there]," as he **stated** to the Financial Times this week.

Regardless of the political differences, Prime Minister Tusk is on the same course as President Duda when it comes to the nuclear

armament of the Polish army. The only difference, which does not change the essence of their endeavours, is that Prime Minister Tusk relies somewhat more on European and less on American support.

**By pushing for nuclear weapons, the Polish leadership is taking almost no political risk in its own country**

Poland "is talking seriously" with France about being protected by the French nuclear umbrella, Prime Minister Tusk **said** in the Polish parliament last week. At the same time, he announced plans to drastically increase the Polish army from just over 200,000 to 500,000 active members.

By pushing for nuclear weapons, the Polish leadership is taking almost no political risk in its own country.

More than half of Poles (53%) **support** plans for the possession of nuclear weapons in their country, while around 28% of citizens are opposed, according to a poll conducted in February.

## American restraint

It is only to be expected that support for Poland's nuclearisation will continue to grow, given the prospect that the Russian threat will remain strong even after achieving peace in Ukraine. These expectations are fuelled by the Trump administration's benevolent attitude towards Moscow and, in particular, the demands with which it is approaching the negotiation process.

Poland has been warning for three years that Russia will continue its aggressive behaviour towards European neighbours even after Ukraine, and Poland is among the first to be affected.



*I would be shocked if president Trump was supportive of nuclear weapons extending further east into Europe - JD Vance*

Both the Polish leadership's current and previous demands for nuclear weapons are based on the need to prevent the expansion of Russia's nuclear arsenal to neighbouring Belarus in 2023.

However, there is virtually no prospect of the USA agreeing to the Polish demands. "I haven't talked to the president about that particular issue, but I would be shocked if he was supportive of nuclear weapons extending further east into Europe," US Vice President JD Vance **told** Fox News regarding this week's demands by Polish President Duda.

At the same time, Poland's demands contradict the US President's intention to quickly conclude peace agreements that also include Ukraine. Giving the Poles hope that they can harbour American nuclear warheads would therefore go against the main directions of Trump's foreign policy.

## The deterrent force is already present

It is therefore not particularly realistic that Poland could become the sixth European country after Germany, Italy, Turkey, Belgium, and the Netherlands to have American nuclear weapons on its territory.

Potential nuclear agreements between Poland and France are uncertain and unlikely to materialise in the near future due to numerous

restrictions. For example, Poland can count on American F-35 aircraft capable of carrying nuclear missiles starting in 2029, but not French-made ones.

## The Polish leadership's open calls for the acceptance of nuclear weapons already have a certain deterrent power in relation to Russia

However, the serious mention of openness to hosting nuclear weapons, which is strongly supported by the public, is already keeping pace with the strong growth of Poland's defence capabilities.

With almost 5% of its GDP spent on defence, Poland is a leader among NATO member states, and its nuclear ambitions place it at the forefront of European security forces.

The Polish leadership's open calls for the acceptance of nuclear weapons in this sense already have a certain deterrent power in relation to Russia, despite the fact that achieving this goal is a multi-year journey.