



By: TA | AP Insight

Macron's new strategy – creating an autonomous European nuclear umbrella



France is moving to align its nuclear deterrent strategy more closely with European allies while keeping full control over any strike decision – an **unprecedented coordination** that French President Emmanuel Macron described as crucial to bolstering the continent's strategic autonomy.

Experts say the plan reflects growing doubts across Europe about U.S. reliability when it comes to the continent's defense. France has been the **only nuclear power** in the European Union since Britain's exit from the bloc in 2020.

Macron's move reflects that, in case of a nuclear crisis, France would be the one offering "some form of a nuclear security guarantee," said Florian Galleri, a nuclear deterrence expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's security studies program.

Speaking Monday from a top-secret submarine base in Western France, Macron announced "a new step of France's deterrence."

His speech marked what could be the start of a major shift in policy that would allow, for the first time, temporary deployment of French nuclear-armed aircraft to allied countries.

Macron said that Paris has started nuclear talks with eight nations – Britain, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark.

Partners joining the initiative would see their territory "gain a clearly affirmed link to our deterrence," Macron said.

Europe would shoulder more of its own security

American allies have played a central role in Europe's defense since the end of World War II, protecting the continent through NATO's nuclear mission.

However, Macron noted, recent U.S. national security and defense strategies reflect a reshuffling of **American priorities**.

Faced with heightened tensions with Russia, which has a vast **nuclear arsenal** and is developing new missiles, and as China expands its nuclear forces, "our way of thinking must change," Macron said.

Outlining the new strategy he called "forward deterrence," Macron insisted that France won't share any decision-making since under its constitution, the president remains solely responsible for any decision on using nuclear weapons.

The new doctrine would allow the temporary deployment of nuclear-armed aircraft to allied countries across Europe

Still, that stance underscores a fundamental contradiction, Galleri said. "The strategic backing intended to integrate French nuclear deterrence into a collective European defense framework necessarily requires a degree of coordination and joint planning," he argued.

"One cannot, for example, carry out a nuclear strike without consulting a partner," he added.

France's new approach offers the possibility for partners to participate in deterrence exercises, Macron also said.

In case of crisis, French nuclear forces could be supported by some European conventional capabilities.

That could involve early warning systems – allies' satellites and radars detecting and tracking missiles, engaging air defense and anti-drone protections and long-range deep-strike capabilities, he said.

Ultimately, the new doctrine would allow the temporary deployment of nuclear-armed aircraft to allied countries across Europe, Macron added.

Strengthening France's nuclear arsenal

Macron also said that evolving defenses among France's competitors, the emergence of regional powers, possible coordination among adversaries and proliferation risks had led him to conclude that France must increase its number of nuclear warheads, for the first time since the 1990s and the end of the Cold War.

France currently possesses an estimated 290 warheads.

If Russia improved its defense systems, then France would need more nuclear warheads - Héloïse Fayet

Héloïse Fayet, a nuclear deterrence specialist at the French Institute of International Relations, a Paris-based think tank, cited a part of Macron's speech where the president said France's nuclear deterrent is designed to inflict on an adversary "damage from which they would not recover."

That means "we must always be able to inflict that kind of damage," Fayet said while deploring Macron's decision not to publicize the numbers of France's warheads.

If Russia, for example, improved its defense systems, then France would need "more nuclear warheads," Fayet said.

Complementing NATO's mission

Macron made clear that any European coordination would come in addition to NATO's nuclear mission, in which France does not participate, and be compatible with the alliance's role in European security.



NATO is critical and France is really not looking to weaken that - Ian Lesser

Ian Lesser, a NATO expert and distinguished fellow at the German Marshall Fund, said Macron's move "reflects the state of security in Europe" following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as the "growing uncertainty about the American security commitment to Europe."

Europe now has to "deal with a more aggressive Russia for some time to come," Lesser said.

NATO's deterrence works through a strong American troop presence in Europe, with U.S. nuclear weapons stationed there, including in Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands.

"The bulk of Europe's conventional deterrence is lodged in NATO — strategic command and organization, design and deployment," Lesser stressed.

"NATO is critical," he added and "France is really not looking to weaken that. So the point about it being complementary is important."