



Anticipating Europe's Nuclear Futures

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Anticipating Europe's Nuclear Futures

The credibility of the United States as the “ultimate guarantor” of peace and stability on the European continent has come under question in recent years as domestic politics and ideology have motivated US foreign policy decisions. While the Biden administration is currently supporting Ukraine and bolstering the US troop presence in Europe under NATO’s framework, the administration’s primary strategic focus remains on China. Meanwhile, there is a powerful faction within the Republican Party that would rather see the US distance itself or withdraw entirely from NATO.¹ Case in point: during his first term, Trump questioned the value of the alliance and almost withdrew from it.² Moreover, as the next presidential election looms, assistance to war-torn Ukraine has become politically contested in the US Congress. According to Republican US House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, voting on the proposed \$95 billion aid package to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan was not urgent.³ Furthermore, on February 10, Trump said at a campaign rally that he would “encourage” the Russians to do “whatever the hell they want” with NATO allies that did not spend enough on their military. In response to Trump’s statement, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated that “Any suggestion that allies will

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not defend each other undermines all of our security, including that of the U.S., and puts American and European soldiers at increased risk,” and European Council President Charles Michel described Trump’s statement as “reckless.”⁴

Citing these uncertainties, political scientist Graham Allison speaks of a “growing fear” among European allies. He argues that these allies are starting to contemplate a “Trump Hedge” by “analyzing the ways in which his return will likely leave them with worse options and preparing accordingly.”⁵ Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman cautions that “US allies facing up to a Trump second term will try not to panic.”⁶ However, at a time when revisionist states are seeking to expand their regional and global influence, questions about NATO credibility themselves are harmful and a US withdrawal would be disastrous.

In addition to these questions regarding US commitments to European security, a second source of uncertainty is the recent shift in the global balance of power. Polarity in the international system has changed from a unipolar system characterized by US primacy to a more multipolar system, whereby revisionist states such as Russia and China are challenging the liberal, rules-based order. Therefore, due to the rise of a revisionist China that challenges the regional and global balance, the importance of the Indo-Pacific theater for the US will likely only increase in the future, which will have implications for Europe and European nuclear deterrence. The two-peer problem will lead to an emerging asymmetry in strategic warheads because the US needs to deter both Russia and China at the same time. A 2023 report from the Center for Global Security Research Study Group at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory found that “the emerging two-peer problem compels significant adaptations to both the hardware and software of extended nuclear deterrence.”⁷

The hardware of extended nuclear deterrence relates to physical components such as nuclear warheads and delivery platforms. The software refers to planning and consultation between the protector and its protégés in an extended nuclear deterrence relationship. The surety of both aspects are now under question. Are the current hardware and software components sufficient for both regions? A clear example of hardware discussions in Europe are proposals that favor Poland joining NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangements, whereby certain allies fly dual-capable aircraft that can deploy US forward-based nuclear weapons if necessary.⁸ A recent expression of a software adaptation in the Indo-Pacific is the Washington Declaration between the US and South Korea, which lays out a commitment to increase consultations on nuclear matters.⁹

What do such international and domestic uncertainties mean for Europe's potential nuclear future? The war in Ukraine is already being fought under a nuclear shadow, as Russia has repeatedly issued nuclear threats, implicit and explicit, to prevent outside intervention.¹⁰ And Moscow will likely increasingly rely on its nuclear arsenal, and nuclear threats, for its security.¹¹

While existing research has tended to examine extended nuclear deterrence from an American point of view, this paper takes a European perspective, taking into account the degraded security environment in Europe since the war in Ukraine began.¹² Below, I lay out six future security scenarios and their implications for nuclear deterrence in Europe: 1) maintaining the current state of affairs; 2) nuclear disarmament; 3) US abandonment; 4) European nuclear autonomy; 5) nuclear proliferation; and 6) a new division of labor. In the final section, I conclude that Europeans should actively work toward realizing the last of these scenarios—taking on the majority of the conventional burden while continuing to share the nuclear burden with the US—to help deter, assure and maximize strategic stability at a pivotal moment for the continent, and indeed, the globe.

What do international and domestic uncertainties mean for Europe's potential nuclear future?

Six Future Scenarios

Scholars have been debating the future of nuclear deterrence in Europe in light of the discussed uncertainties. Three different types of solutions can be identified: first, adapting NATO's nuclear policies, including expanding the membership of Allies that take part in nuclear sharing arrangements to Poland or other Allies on the Eastern flank;¹³ second, nuclear disarmament, especially after the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted in 2017 (scenario 2 below);¹⁴ and third, creating a so-called Eurodeterrent, ranging from a French or Anglo-French nuclear umbrella to an independent German nuclear arsenal or Franco-German nuclear cooperation to creating a multilateral European nuclear force (scenarios 4 and 5).

The following sections describe six possible future security scenarios and their implications for nuclear deterrence in Europe. I start by discussing a possible continuation of the current state of affairs. Subsequently, I address two scenarios that would be most detrimental to European security, namely nuclear disarmament and US abandonment. Then, two proliferation scenarios in the case of US abandonment are considered, namely European nuclear autonomy and nuclear

proliferation by individual allies. Lastly, the most ideal and durable scenario is discussed: a new division of labor on the continent.

Scenario I: Maintaining the Current State of Affairs

It is plausible that the United States will remain the “ultimate guarantor” for the foreseeable future. In that vein, researchers Liviu Horowitz and Lydia Wachs argue that “Washington’s response to the Ukraine war has made clear that the United States will maintain its commitment to European security for the time being.”¹⁵ And while the comments of former President Trump calling NATO “obsolete” in 2019 questioned the reliability of US extended deterrence, the US Department of Defense’s 2018 Nuclear Posture Review confirmed the modernization of NATO’s theater nuclear forces.¹⁶ In other words, despite the negative US political rhetoric on NATO, the continuation of the modernization plans signaled the enduring US commitment to European security even during Trump’s presidency.

Nevertheless, levels of regional engagement always vary from administration to administration. Therefore, it is possible that a future US administration might even pivot back to Europe and de-prioritize East Asia. However, this seems highly unlikely considering the political stances of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

It is more likely that the United States will stay present in other regions, such as Europe and the Middle East, but keep prioritizing the Indo-Pacific.¹⁷ While President Biden stated at the 2021 Munich Security Conference that “America is back; the trans-Atlantic alliance is back,”¹⁸ researcher Dick Zandee argued that the statement should not be seen as running against the larger structural trend of the US “pivot to Asia” that started under the Obama Administration and will continue because of China’s rise in power.¹⁹

One other possibility is what analysts Tim Sweijs and Michael Mazarr caution against: that “while the Indo-Pacific is certainly a principal concern, the United States should not overshoot in regional prioritization. This will generate power vacuums that other powers rush to fill.”²⁰ Overshooting regional prioritization could thus result in more room for revisionist states in Europe (Russia) and the Middle East (Iran) to expand their power at the cost of US global influence. Consequently, this would be detrimental to the overall balance of power between the West and what analyst Hanna Notte calls “Russia’s Axis of the Sanctioned” and China.²¹

According to international security analyst Robert Litwak, China is in the process of becoming a “near-peer nuclear power” by modernizing and expanding its nuclear arsenal.²² This strategic build-up has led to profound changes in the regional nuclear balance. As a result, the continuation of US strategic

realignment to the Indo-Pacific is probable for the foreseeable future. An important question is thus how credible US nuclear extended deterrence in Europe will be when it faces two peer nuclear superpowers (Russia & China) and clearly prioritizes countering one of these major powers (China). This could result in concern among European NATO Allies and in proliferation pressures at worst.

The implication of this geopolitical state of affairs for the nuclear balance of forces in Europe is that a continuation of the status quo will not be sustainable. The two-peer nuclear problem will create worries within NATO and might result in a (perceived) imbalance in Europe between Russia and the European NATO allies if the United States does not adapt its extended nuclear deterrence policy in the long run. Considering the nuclear threat from Russia, European states may start balancing on their own by hedging or developing an independent nuclear arsenal.

A continuation of the status quo in Europe will not be sustainable

Scenario 2: Nuclear Disarmament

Idealists would prefer that Europe move toward being a nuclear-weapons-free zone.²³ This scenario would entail the end of the nuclear sharing arrangements and France disarming its nuclear arsenal. However, unilateral disarmament would leave Europe even more exposed to Russian nuclear blackmail. Moreover, former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson questioned the use of unilateral disarmament as a confidence-building measure: “How can you persuade a paranoid adversary to disarm ‘by example?’”²⁴ It is also crucial to remember why the UK and France have independent nuclear arsenals in the first place: a lack of trust in the US nuclear umbrella. Nuclear strategists Lawrence Freedman and Jeffrey Michaels have stated that the UK’s independent nuclear arsenal was an “insurance” against US abandonment but not a “substitute,” and that France saw the US nuclear umbrella “as a flimsy foundation for security.”²⁵ So it is highly unlikely that these nuclear-weapon states would unilaterally give up their arsenals without a credible alternative, such as a nuclear-weapons-free zone that includes a reliable Russia.

Mutual nuclear disarmament between Russia and Europe remains unlikely, especially considering the erosion of arms control regimes globally and in Europe, as well as the increased importance of nuclear deterrence for security in Europe. Furthermore, concerning arms control between the US, Russia and China, nuclear expert Caitlin Talmadge argues that three-sided nuclear competition complicates arms control because it results in the introduction of additional veto players, namely the allies in different regions. Subsequently, if the guarantor (the US)

agrees to limits on its nuclear arsenal, abandonment fears may arise amongst allies sheltering under the US nuclear umbrella. Therefore, Talmadge concludes that “US extended deterrence commitments were and continue to be a roadblock to nuclear arms control.”²⁶ Moreover, trust in the leadership of the other party (in this case, Russia) is key to agreeing on new arms control and/or disarmament initiatives; by escalating the war, Putin has destroyed any trust for the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, as researchers Michael Onderco et al. discuss, the increase in public support for nuclear deterrence after Russia invaded Ukraine “means that, suddenly, civil society organisations might be going against the grain of the public in lobbying for the withdrawal of these weapons.”²⁷ Future opportunities concerning arms control and disarmament will thus probably depend on the outcome of the war. At the moment, however, the prospects for arms control and disarmament seem bleak.

The implications for the regional nuclear balance of forces in a unilateral disarmament scenario are detrimental for European NATO member states, as they would become more vulnerable to Russian nuclear blackmail, and due to Russia’s bellicosity, the outlook concerning regional and global arms control and disarmament is bleak.

Scenario 3: US Abandonment

If the United States were to decouple from its European allies, the nuclear power balance would swing dramatically in favor of Russia. While this scenario seems unlikely, analysts at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) argue that the traditional fear of US abandonment “cannot be escaped.”²⁸ Subsequently, such a development could lead to the emergence of a destabilizing multipolar order on the continent.²⁹ If the European allies did not come together and develop a credible extended deterrence arrangement based on France and the UK’s nuclear arsenals, or create a multilateral European nuclear force, other countries—such as Germany or Poland—would be tempted to go nuclear by themselves to balance against Russia. Another possibility is that some European states start bandwagoning with Russia or accommodating its territorial expansion.

US abandonment, or the perceived risk of it, could thus lead to the “tectonic shift” nuclear expert Oliver Meier deems necessary before Germany would contemplate a “European nuclear option” as a replacement for the US nuclear umbrella, such as a French nuclear umbrella or the creation of a Franco-German nuclear arsenal.³⁰ However, political scientist Barry Posen argues that the Europeans can already defend themselves. While predominantly focusing on the conventional forces of European states, Posen does mention the deterrence effect that the two European nuclear-weapons states, the UK and

France, have on Russian decision-making. Starting a war against a European coalition that includes one or both of the European nuclear-weapon states could still lead to devastating nuclear escalation.³¹

Nevertheless, some argue that it would be prudent to answer French President Macron's call for a dialogue on nuclear deterrence among Europeans as a forum to discuss a potential "plan B" to hedge against such a disastrous abandonment scenario.³² Macron made a plea for such dialogue during a speech at *L'École de Guerre* in 2020 and emphasized the "European dimension" of the French nuclear forces.³³ Meanwhile, former security policy adviser to Chancellor Merkel Christoph Heusgen was quoted in *Der Spiegel* in 2020 stating that "the old trans-Atlantic certainties no longer apply." As a result, he argues that "a European nuclear umbrella would in no way be an end in itself, but rather a kind of insurance policy should NATO become unreliable."³⁴ In January 2024, the leader of the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, Manfred Weber, also called for the creation of a European atomic shield. He understood this as embedding the French nuclear arsenal in "European structures" and is a proponent of taking up Macron's proposal of a strategic dialogue among Europeans in the meantime.³⁵ Nevertheless, this could also be a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby developing a Eurodeterrent increases the risk of decoupling.

The implications for the nuclear balance of force in the event of US abandonment are profound. Europeans could feel pressured to develop a Eurodeterrent or individual states could choose to go it alone, leading to nuclear proliferation. Both the Eurodeterrent and proliferation scenarios will be discussed in the next sections. Alternatively, some states with closer ties to Russia, such as Hungary, could also bandwagon with Russia or start appeasing Russian imperial aspirations.³⁶ Nevertheless, bandwagoning seems unlikely because of the negative experiences with Russian domination by some of the Eastern and Central European states; for instance, the Prague Spring of 1968, which led to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and a crack down on political reforms.

The implications for nuclear forces in case of US abandonment are profound

Scenario 4: European Nuclear Autonomy

In the rather unlikely but conceivable scenario of US abandonment, Europeans may feel pressure to proliferate. The key question for understanding the first proliferation path is: does European strategic autonomy require nuclear autonomy? Researcher Margriet Drent argues, for instance, that "if our understanding of a European strategic autonomy means Europe's ability to guarantee its own

security, this also entails the need for an independent European nuclear umbrella.”³⁷ As listed above, there have been multiple sub-scenarios proposed regarding the creation of a Eurodeterrent, ranging from the creation of a multilateral European nuclear force to a French nuclear umbrella replacing the US umbrella, and bilateral options such as an Anglo-French nuclear umbrella or Franco-German nuclear cooperation. Regarding a multilateral Eurodeterrent in an EU context, Brexit has created complications. However, political scientist Bruno Tertrais states that if the development of a Eurodeterrent remained outside the framework of the EU, it is possible that the nuclear arsenal of the UK could be included.³⁸

The current UK and French nuclear arsenals would be insufficient

Nonetheless, nuclear autonomy is currently unlikely because of the small size of the French (or even the combined Anglo-French) nuclear arsenal and the lack of unity among Europeans in their attitudes toward nuclear weapons. Regarding the former, Horowitz and Wachs point toward the lack of flexibility of gradual nuclear response options and the small size of the

French arsenal. For example, in a conventional invasion on the Baltic states, France would need to deter Russia by threatening to use strategic nuclear weapons. Such a threat could lack credibility due to the risks a strategic exchange entails and, therefore, fail to deter.³⁹ Tertrais argues that “for both political and technical reasons (the small size of the French airborne arsenal, about 40-45 missiles), it is unlikely that Paris and its European partners would seek to mirror the exact scope of current NATO arrangements.”⁴⁰ If the current arrangements are considered inadequate, replacing the roughly 100 US forward-based nuclear bombs with a dozen French nuclear missiles would be a quantitative downgrade.⁴¹ Moreover, Kunz mentions that the UK’s submarine-based deterrent is also not suitable for providing traditional extended nuclear deterrence, which relies more on stationing and sharing nuclear weapons, such as the NATO arrangements.⁴² Consequently, the current arsenals of France and the UK would be insufficient to provide for credible extended nuclear deterrence.

As to the lack of unity on nuclear weapons, there is a stark division between the EU member states that are NATO allies and those that have signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: i.e., Austria and Ireland. As a result, in the likely case of anti-nuclear EU member states remaining opponents of nuclear deterrence, a multilateral nuclear force consisting of European NATO allies would need to be developed outside the EU framework. It is possible that in the case of US abandonment, the remaining NATO allies would

continue the Alliance. Such an arrangement would run into the same problems described above if it relies on existing nuclear arsenals. However, if the Europeans can build up and diversify their arsenal, which would take time and significant resources, autonomous nuclear balancing could bring strategic stability.

Furthermore, researchers Ursula Jasper and Clara Portela point to the concern that a Eurodeterrent would be seen as “internal proliferation” and thus also weaken the global non-proliferation regime.⁴³ While this would not be the case if the existing US nuclear umbrella was substituted with a French or Anglo-French nuclear umbrella, this would be true if a multilateral European nuclear force were to be created. However, Tertrais mentions German and Italian concerns about the ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁴⁴ The Federal Republic of Germany stated in its declaration, made upon signature, that the NPT “shall not hamper the unification of the European States.”⁴⁵ Similarly, the Italian declaration stated that the government signed the NPT “in the firm belief that nothing in it is an obstacle to the unification of the Countries of Western Europe.”⁴⁶ Subsequently, the argument can be made that based on these reservations, the creation of a Eurodeterrent needed for European unification would not be a violation of the NPT, but it could lead to further eroding the “spirit” of the non-proliferation regime.⁴⁷

In this scenario, the nuclear balance in Europe would swing in favor of Russia, creating a major asymmetry, especially given the number of tactical nuclear weapons it possesses (according to open-source data, about 1816.)⁴⁸ The US Department of Defense defines tactical or non-strategic nuclear weapons as “nuclear weapons designed to be used on a battlefield in military situations. This is as opposed to strategic nuclear weapons, which are designed to be used against enemy cities, factories, and other larger-area targets to damage the enemy’s ability to wage war.”⁴⁹ Nuclear analyst William Alberque argues that it is “highly likely” that Putin sees non-strategic nuclear weapons as “flexible tools” for various usages—namely coercion, controlling escalation, deterring interventions by outside forces, forcing war termination on Russian conditions, preventing horizontal escalation from a local to a regional conflict, and preventing vertical escalation from the theater to the strategic level.⁵⁰ In turn, the lack of tactical nuclear weapons in the French and British nuclear arsenals means that they would need to respond with strategic weapons against a tactical strike in certain scenarios, or even against a conventional invasion. Such a reaction could well lead to further nuclear escalation. As argued above, such a threat would probably not be credible in the first place. Consequently, the Eurodeterrent scenario entails significant political, technological and credibility problems that are hard and costly to overcome.

Scenario 5: Nuclear Proliferation

If the United States abandoned Europe, and the nuclear arsenals of the UK and France were deemed insufficient for replacing US extended deterrence, some states (e.g., Germany and Poland) could start hedging or proliferating. These states would have to have concluded that relying on conventional deterrence alone would not be prudent, especially if they were facing a hostile Russia increasingly reliant on its nuclear arsenal because of the degradation of its conventional forces amidst (or after) the war in Ukraine.⁵¹ In addition, Russia created a dangerous precedent in Ukraine by extending its nuclear umbrella over its military invasion of the non-nuclear armed state to prevent outside intervention.⁵² States that feel threatened by Russia can therefore conclude that nuclear weapons are an absolute necessity to deter an invasion.

Amidst the end of the Cold War and the crumbling of the Soviet Union, John Mearsheimer challenged the prevailing spirit of optimism by positing a scenario whereby both superpowers (the US and the USSR) could end their security commitments and withdraw their troops from the continent. According to this pessimistic argument, as Europe transformed from a bipolar to multipolar system, the two superpowers' withdrawal of their nuclear arsenals would "remove the pacifying effect that these weapons have had on European politics."⁵³ He envisioned four scenarios of how Europeans could respond to the withdrawal: (1) creating a nuclear-weapons-free Europe, (2) the existing nuclear-weapons states in Europe maintaining their arsenal levels, (3) mismanaged nuclear proliferation, and (4) well-managed nuclear proliferation. Mearsheimer considered the last scenario to be the least dangerous, but argued that well-managed proliferation was unlikely.⁵⁴

However, during the first 25 years of the post-Cold War period, this pessimistic vision for Europe did not come to pass. While the Soviet Union pulled out of Central as well as Eastern Europe and collapsed in 1991 as the Warsaw Pact dissolved, the United States significantly reduced its numbers of troops and types of conventional and nuclear weaponry on the continent while still maintaining a noticeable presence. Not only did NATO not go away, but former Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union states have joined. Nonetheless, if the United States abandoned its European allies in the current context, proliferation pressures could appear.

In terms of the nuclear balance in Europe, Russia would have a numerical advantage over any smaller European arsenals. Nevertheless, the increase in independent decision-making centers also complicates the calculation of Russia as a potential adversary. In addition, the creation of additional nuclear-armed states would also imply a shift in the intra-European balance of power; the emergence of a nuclear Germany or Poland would shift the regional balance of power further to the east. Moreover, proliferation on the European continent could destroy the

global non-proliferation regime, and thus result in additional proliferation cases in other regions such as the Middle East and East Asia. Consequently, this—rather unlikely—scenario would lead to the creation of the more unstable multipolar nuclear order in Europe that Mearsheimer described.

Scenario 6: A New Division of Labor

A final scenario to consider is if a future US administration could decide to withdraw conventional forces from the continent because of a crisis or war in the Indo-Pacific region, but stay engaged in the nuclear realm as an ultimate nuclear guarantor. This would result in a new division of labor, whereby European allies would provide for their own conventional defense, and the US, together with France and the UK, would continue to provide the nuclear backbone of NATO's deterrence posture. In 2018, political scientist Alexander Mattelaer proposed a similar regional division of labor whereby the “geographical frontier states ... concentrate their security resources on defending their territory and neighbourhood, whereas geographically sheltered Western European allies retain a more expeditionary mindset.” Subsequently, he argued, the United States should focus on “the provision of key enablers and reserves forces” and (extended) nuclear deterrence.⁵⁵ Similarly, the CGSR Study Group is in favor of creating a “new division of deterrence labor.”⁵⁶ Nonetheless, this new division of labor would by definition heavily impact the conventional balance of force in Europe. Therefore, it is critically important that the United States stay engaged in a NATO context to prevent a destabilizing multipolar order in Europe.

European allies could provide conventional defense while the US provides the nuclear backbone

While maintaining the conventional balance of forces would be the responsibility of European NATO member states, the nuclear balance would remain the same in the short term. As mentioned above, Posen argues that the Europeans can already defend themselves in the conventional realm. If the US keeps providing key strategic enablers and the Europeans keep modernizing and building up conventional capabilities, it may indeed be possible and feasible for the Europeans to take the lead in conventional defense. Nevertheless, as in the first scenario, the two-peer nuclear problem will create issues in the long term and dictate a need for adjustments in strategy, posture and/or doctrine to make US extended deterrence durable in the 21st century. The outcomes of the July 2023 Vilnius Summit therefore provide the necessary room to adapt the NATO nuclear posture. The Communiqué stated in this regard that “NATO will take all

necessary steps to ensure the credibility, effectiveness, safety and security of the nuclear deterrent mission. This includes continuing to modernise NATO's nuclear capability and updating planning to increase flexibility and adaptability of the Alliance's nuclear forces."⁵⁷ Consequently, this is the most durable scenario that results in the survival of the transatlantic Alliance, while at the same time allowing the US to increase its engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Europe's New Burden Sharing

After many years of not thinking about the unthinkable, the debate on the future of nuclear deterrence in Europe has returned. This paper identifies two future uncertainties that could have implications for nuclear deterrence in Europe. First is the increased uncertainty that a future US administration, specifically a Republican administration, could bring. The second source of uncertainty is the shifting dynamics that determine the global balance of power, as the international system has moved from unipolar to multipolar. In that vein, the rise of China and the US prioritization of the Indo-Pacific theater have become the main dynamics which will drive extended nuclear deterrence debates going forward. In particular, the rising two-peer problem is set to exacerbate American fears of overstretch and European fears of abandonment.

Europeans cannot be content with the current state of nuclear affairs

Considering these uncertainties, Europeans cannot be content with the current state of nuclear affairs. The time is right to make adjustments to deterrence in Europe. Europe needs to build up its armed forces to bear the majority of the conventional burden in NATO, whilst continuing to share the nuclear burden with the US. Thus the "new division of labor" scenario outlined above is

the most sustainable option, and should be actively pursued. In this way, European allies can alleviate the military burden on the US to deter two peer powers at the same time, while keeping the US engaged in the European theater to deter the most extreme threats. This logic is similar to the objective of the Eurogroup in NATO (1968). According to Freedman, the group aimed to "hold the Atlantic Alliance together and not to push it apart" by increasing European cooperation to avoid US abandonment.⁵⁸

NATO turns 75 this year, and during its history, American and European democracies have together overcome numerous external and internal challenges. Today, NATO allies and the broader West find themselves again in turbulent geopolitical times. Regardless of who becomes the next President of the

United States, Europeans and Americans at all levels of government and society need to highlight the enduring importance of the US as the “ultimate guarantor” of transatlantic peace and security through credible extended nuclear deterrence. Especially if a more transactional administration comes to power in the United States, NATO allies will need to renegotiate the “grand bargain” that connects the fates of Americans and Europeans for the next 75 years, giving the Europeans a greater role in burden-sharing. As they face the new nuclear age, Europe and its allies must start debating these issues.

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