

Transforming the European Union into a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone: A Long-Term Strategic Objective of Nordic Diplomacy

Oscar Brunzell*

School of Public Affairs, Sciences Po Paris, Paris 75007, France

ABSTRACT

This article is written as a tribute to Nordic diplomacy, which has long championed global disarmament efforts. The article focuses its discussion on the Undén proposal, a significant post-World War II initiative of Nordic diplomacy aimed at curbing the spread of nuclear weapons. The proposal has global significance, serving as a foundational strategy for establishing United Nations resolutions on Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZ). Subsequently, Nordic diplomacy has garnered support from various ardent proponents against nuclear weapon proliferation, including Martti Ahtisaari, Hans Blix, and Olof Palme. Further, the article proposes a solution aligned with the ethos of Nordic diplomacy, focusing on peacetime scenarios within the European Union (EU) and granting an exemption to France due to its nuclear capabilities and military commitments. The objective is for the EU to lead by example in nuclear disarmament, echoing the principles outlined in the United Nations' disarmament agenda.

Keywords: Nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ), Nordic diplomacy, European Union (EU), Nuclear disarmament, Non-proliferation

INTRODUCTION

It has been more than 80 years since the US dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan, ending the Second World War. From the blasts of the two bombs, we have known what terrible things we-human-beings-can do to ourselves and our environment. With just one nuclear warhead, we can level an entire city and kill millions of people. Furthermore, the radiation from nuclear weapons lingers in the environment, affecting the lives of future generations through its long-term contamination. Currently, there are more than 12,000 warheads worldwide, over 85 percent held by the US and Russia. Seven more states hold nuclear weapons, though in fairly low numbers, albeit with the capacity to build many more.

Researchers at Los Alamos laboratory and developers of the two bombs dropped estimated (in 1945) that "it would require only in the neighborhood of 10 to 100 'Supers' of this type" to endanger the human race. Simply put, today's 12,000-plus warheads could render mankind extinct 100 times over [32]. It's not a very good prospect for the future. Even if progress has been found in the disarmament of nuclear weapons, the existence of even one nuclear weapon makes the risk of using nuclear weapons in armed conflict a possibility.

In 1985, at their summit in Geneva, US and the Soviet Union agreed that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought" [16]. This common-sense principle (known as the Reagan-Gorbachev Principle) should be the voice of wisdom for all world leaders.

With the constant threat of a nuclear weapons catastrophe that would extinguish all life on earth, there is a continuing debate about whether we, mankind, can save both the earth and humanity from nuclear Armageddon by eliminating all nuclear weapons. Though the debate has some results, it must continue until all nuclear weapons are eliminated. A roadblock to a nuclear-weapon-free world, however, is that superpowers are nuclear weapons advocates, undermining the possibility of imminent limitations/reductions. To keep the initiative alive, small victories must be lauded, such as establishing five regional Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZ), which forbid nuclear weapons in over 50 percent of the continental land mass.

In line with Nordic diplomacy's principles, this article proposes a practical approach toward achieving a nuclear-free EU during peacetime. Recognizing the complexities involved, the proposal aims to take incremental steps toward disarmament.

Correspondence to: Oscar Brunzell, School of Public Affairs, Sciences Po Paris, Paris 75007, France, Email: oscar.brunzell@sciencespo.fr

Received: 25-Aug-2025, Manuscript No. JPSPA-25-38584; **Editor assigned:** 27-Aug-2025, PreQC No. JPSPA-25-38584 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 10-Sep-2025, QC No. JPSPA-25-38584; **Revised:** 17-Sep-2025, Manuscript No. JPSPA-25-38584 (R); **Published:** 24-Sep-2025, DOI: 10.35248/2332-0761.25.13.088

Citation: Brunzell O (2025). Transforming the European Union into a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone: A Long-Term Strategic Objective of Nordic Diplomacy. J Pol Sci Pub Aff. 13: 088.

Copyright: © 2025 Brunzell O. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

The proposal acknowledges France's unique position as a nuclear-armed state within the EU and advocates for tailored solutions that preserve existing military arrangements while promoting broader disarmament objectives.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

How dangerous are nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons stand as the most perilous armaments on Earth, according to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). The devastation they bring upon detonation surpasses that of conventional bombs by a vast margin. The energy unleashed, and the intensity of effects like temperature and radiation dwarfs any other weapon. A single nuclear bomb holds the capacity to obliterate an entire city, claiming millions of lives, while its radioactive fallout inflicts enduring environmental and generational repercussions. Furthermore, the psychological impact is profound.

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), an autonomous institution within the UN, delves into disarmament and its ramifications. It identifies four potential triggers for nuclear detonation: doctrinal, escalatory, unauthorized, and accidental [27]. The overarching solution to nullify these triggers is disarmament.

The Encyclopedia Britannica provides insights into the cataclysmic aftermath of a nuclear explosion. It notes that the potency of such an explosion hinges on various factors: the design (fission or fusion), yield, detonation location (air or ground), meteorological conditions, and the target's status. All nuclear detonations generate a fireball with temperatures akin to the Sun's core, distributing energy as 50% blast energy (shock), 35% thermal energy (heat), and 15% nuclear radiation. Temporal effects are categorized into four types: instantaneous, near-immediate, short-term, and long-term. Instantaneously, temperatures soaring to several million degrees Celsius evaporate all human tissue within the blast area. In the near-immediate aftermath, the heat engulfs buildings, causing collapse, while the vacuum effect drains oxygen, suffocating survivors. Short-term radioactive fallout from the explosion directly impacts the environment, its severity contingent upon

factors like air or ground detonation and wind speed. Long-term ramifications, such as soil contamination and cancers in humans and wildlife, persist and are influenced by various parameters.

Estimating the number of nuclear weapons worldwide

Nine nations wield nuclear arms. Five are NPT-designated nuclear states (US, UK, France, Russia, China), while India, Pakistan, and North Korea possess nuclear capabilities, and Israel is presumed to have nuclear armaments. Previously, South Africa dismantled its nuclear program, while Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine relinquished their weapons to Russia. Additionally, five NATO members store US nuclear weapons.

Over the last three decades, global nuclear weaponry saw a drastic reduction from over 70,000 warheads in 1986 to slightly above 12,000 today. However, this reduction seems misleading as the decline primarily comprises dismantled retired warheads, with operational force stockpiles increasing. Despite the US's gradual reduction and France's stagnant numbers, China, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and the UK are augmenting their arsenals.

Hans M. Kristensen, a leading authority on nuclear weapons and Director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), has concluded: "The overall number of warheads in global military stockpiles now appears to be increasing, a worrisome sign that the declining trend that has characterized global nuclear arsenals since the end of the Cold War has stalled." [21]. Kristensen expresses concern about the Chinese extended nuclear program and says that "The Chinese missile silo program constitutes the most extensive silo construction since the US and Soviet missile silo construction during the Cold War [8].

Of the world's estimated 12,241 nuclear warheads, about 9,600 are ready for use [9]. Of these, approximately 3,800 nuclear warheads are deployed with operational force (on missiles or bombers), and the US, the UK, France, and Russia have about 2,200 warheads on high alert, i.e., can be used at short notice. Included in the 12,241 warheads are 2,600 warheads that are to be scrapped; however, these warheads are relatively intact until they are scrapped [9]. A detailed breakdown is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Status of World Nuclear Forces 2025.

Country	Deployed strategic	Deployed nonstrategic	Reserve/nondeployed	Retired	Total inventory
Russia	1718	0	2591	1150	5459
United States	1670	100	1930	1477	5177
China	0	n.a.	600	0	600
France	290	n.a.	0	0	290
United Kingdom	120	n.a.	105	0	225
India	0	n.a.	180	0	180

Pakistan	0	n.a.	170	0	170
Israel	0	n.a.	90	0	90
North Korea	0	n.a.	50	0	50
Total	~ 3,798	~ 100	~ 5,716	~ 2,627	~ 12,241

Note: Source: Status of World Nuclear Forces 2025, FAS, <https://fas.org/initiative/status-world-nuclear-forces/> Downloaded on July 10th, 2025.

The accuracy of the number of nuclear warheads differs between the countries. Three of the nuclear weapons countries—the US, the UK, and France—are transparent about their nuclear holdings. For other countries, the level of information available varies markedly.

Israel, for example, denies possession of nuclear weapons. FAS the most reliable source for estimating nuclear weapons holdings states that their “estimates for several of the other nuclear weapon states are highly uncertain” [9].

The European union and nuclear warhead holdings

Of the European Union's 27 member states, only one country possesses nuclear warheads, France. Two member states (Denmark and Spain) have introduced laws banning nuclear weapons on their territory. Both countries experienced nuclear accidents with the US Air Force, Spain in 1966 with the so-called Palomares incident [25] and Denmark in 1968 with the so-called Thule accident [18].

The French stand when it comes to nuclear warheads is very firm, best phrased in “never again 1940” [13]. An updated declaration of the French stand on nuclear weapons was made on 13 July 2017 by French President Emmanuel Macron, explaining that nuclear deterrence is “the keystone of our

security and the guarantee of our vital interests” [16]. This view is uncontroversial in France, where the French people and all political parties believe and stand behind it. The attribution for making sure that France could develop nuclear weapons and secure its sovereignty is General Charles de Gaulle, dubbed as twice the savior of France [10]. De Gaulle formulated the French security policy, which was to ensure the full sovereignty of France. De Gaulle argued that nuclear weapons are a means “to exist by ourselves and, in the event of a drama, to choose our own direction” [20]. According to de Gaulle, it was unacceptable that France did not participate either scientifically or industrially in developing “the most powerful weapons of the time” [5].

In 2025, France holds almost 300 warheads [15]. The holdings are supposed to give France both strategic and tactical nuclear capabilities. The backbone of the French defense is the Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). Like the other two Western nuclear powers, the French navy has a structure where at least one submarine patrols, another prepares for patrolling, a third returns to port, and a fourth submarine is undergoing maintenance. For this, France needs a set of 3 batches of 16 missiles. Secondly, the French nuclear warheads consist of Air-Launched Cruise Missiles (ASMPA). These warheads are divided between two squadrons at the Saint-Dizier Air Base, less than 200 km from Paris as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: France key numbers and figures (2020).

Nuclear weapons	Less than 300
Nuclear forces	3 (air, sea, aircraft carrier)
SSBN bases	1 (Ile Longue)
SSBNs	4 (of which 3 in the operational cycle)
M51 SLBMs	48 (3 batches of 16)
Warheads per SLBM	variable
Nuclear air bases	3 (Saint-Dizier, Avord, Istres)
Nuclear-capable aircraft	2 squadrons of Rafale, 1 flotilla of Rafale-M
ASMPA cruise missiles	classified [total of 54 launchers in 2015]
Warheads per ASMPA	1
Budget	5 billion euros/year (2019-2023)
Share of the defense budget	12.5% / year (2019-2025)

Note: French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, And Future: A Handbook By Bruno Tertrais, 2020. https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/recherches-et-documents/2020/20_2004.pdf Downloaded on July 10th, 2025.

No other European Union member state holds its own nuclear warheads besides France. Four countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands) hold U.S. missiles as part of NATO's nuclear sharing policy. It should be noted that US nuclear warheads were stored in Greece from 1963 to 1984.

To trigger the nuclear warheads, the host countries need permission codes from the US Department of Defense, i.e., the warheads are protected by the so-called Permissive Action Links. The daily operation and protection of the warheads are undertaken by NATO's so-called Storage Security System, which has continuously upgraded operations and systems since 2015. Hans M. Kristensen concluded that the U.S. "nuclear weapons deployed in Europe have been stored under unsafe conditions for more than two decades" [14].

RESULTS

Nuclear weapon disarmament plans

There have been several honorable plans on how to disarm, but the effort started more or less right after the two nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. In November 1945, the United States, the UK, and Canada proposed the establishment of a UN Atomic Energy Commission intending to eliminate the use of nuclear energy for destructive purposes. In June 1946, Bernard Baruch presented the so-called Baruch Plan, which proposed a policy for arms control that also included nuclear weapons. At the time, Baruch was the United States representative to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC). The Baruch Plan is to a large degree based on a Report by Dean Acheson and David Lilienthal presented at the first meeting of UNAEC in June 1946.) However, the plan was rejected by the Soviet Union, who presented a counter-proposal in that they claimed that the UN was not to be trusted as they exercised authority over nuclear weapons. The Soviets concluded that the UN could not be trusted because the UN was dominated by the United States and its allies in Western Europe. These two rejections were the beginning of the Cold War arms race.

The Rapacki Plan

On 2 October 1957, the UN general assembly presented the first plan for a European nuclear-weapon-free zone. Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki proposed that nuclear weapons should be prohibited from production and storage in Central Europe. What was later called the "Rapacki Plan" meant that if East Germany and West Germany were made nuclear-free, Poland would follow suit and also be nuclear-weapon-free [21]. At the plan's proposal, Czechoslovakia expressed its desire to be part of the nuclear-weapon-free zone.

An overview of the Rapacki plan shows that the plan would benefit Poland greatly in that the United States would be forced to withdraw its tactical nuclear weapons stationed in West Germany, and the plan would give Poland greater independence from Soviet rule.

Furthermore, it was considered that the Rapacki Plan gave an advantage to the Soviet Union, as the Warsaw Pact had a great superiority in conventional weapons. The Western countries and NATO saw insurmountable dangers with the plan, in that a ban on nuclear weapons in West Germany would jeopardize NATO's defensive strategy and upset the balance of power between the blocs in favor of Soviet conventional superiority in Central Europe.

The Rapacki plan was supported by all the countries of the Soviet-dominated states in the Warsaw Pact, and likewise, it was rejected by all NATO countries. During the Berlin crisis of 1958-1959, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev tried to force West Germany to accept the plan, which was the essential condition for the plan. Mr. Rapacki made several modifications to his plan but without arousing much interest.

The Irish Plan and the Undén Proposal

In the late fall of 1961, two of the most important disarmament drafts were presented in the UN General Assembly in what professor James Stocker called "a singular moment in the history of diplomatic efforts to stem nuclear proliferation" [22]. First, the so-called Irish plan was presented, followed by the so-called Undén proposal. The two drafts contained two very different approaches to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The UN General Assembly approved both drafts, the Irish plan unanimously, while the Undén proposal was approved only after many countries, including the United States, had abstained. Stocker claims that the fact that most countries voted for both resolutions "suggests that they saw the two measures as complementary" [22]. The Irish plan is considered to be a forerunner for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and the Undén proposal with the Rapacki plan is considered to be the forerunner to the creation of the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZ).

At the 1961 fall UN session, the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, the pragmatic Frank Aiken, presented to the UN General Assembly an updated version of a resolution on nuclear disarmament that the Irish had been working on for several years [1]. The so-called "Irish Plan" called on all states to conclude an international agreement in which countries with nuclear weapons would not provide nuclear weapons or know-how to non-nuclear states, and non-nuclear states would undertake not to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons. The Irish plan was unanimously approved in the UN General Assembly on 4 December 1961. (The Irish plan is listed as the UN resolution 1665 (XVI).)

On the same day as the Irish plan was approved, the Undén proposal was approved by the UN General Assembly as a UN resolution with 58 votes in favor (the Nordic countries, countries in the Warsaw Pact, and Third World countries), 10 votes against (all NATO members) and 23 votes against suspension (Latin American countries and former French colonies in Africa). Though the NATO member states opposed the proposal, the three Nordic countries—Denmark, Norway, Iceland—and Canada favored the proposal. For NATO, the major stumbling block in the proposal was the proposed commitment to refrain from any future storage of nuclear weapons in foreign territories. The US

Foreign Ministry officials believed that the proposal with a “non-nuclear club” would upset the existing balance of power in Europe, for which the US should cast a negative vote. However, President Kennedy changed the US stand on posting a veto and abstained instead from voting (to avoid a split in the NATO Alliance since the four NATO member states voted in favor of the resolution).

Based on the Undén proposal, in 1963, Finnish President Urho Kekkonen proposed that the Nordic region should be declared a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Since the Nordic region was already a nuclear-weapon-free zone in practice, the idea was to commit the five countries to abandon nuclear weapons formally. President Kekkonen reasoned that it is important that small countries, squeezed by unreasonable and suspicious superpowers who accelerated the arms race, should take the initiative to alleviate the existing international tension [3]. Sweden was positive and supported the idea, which the Norwegian and Danish governments did not. It is generally believed that Norway and Denmark feared that a Nordic nuclear-weapon-free zone would affect NATO's possibilities and obligations to protect Europe.

The world disarmament status and the disarmament work of the United Nations

The main reason we have nuclear weapons is for deterrence purposes. Consequently, even though many countries advocate the total dismantling of nuclear weapons as a long-term objective, countries with nuclear weapons mostly believe that today, there is no possibility for unilateral disarmament. Disarmament, therefore, is predicated on an omni-lateral, regulated, verifiable reduction in weapons. This belief is based on the security-related aspects that make it unrealistic today to eliminate nuclear weapons. This is where believing in the need for deterrence clashes with the hope of disarmament.

The work of the United Nations is not easy. Even with the best intentions, the best people, and the best circumstances, the success of world disarmament is in the hands of the two superpowers the US and Russia. Unfortunately, in 2025, the future doesn't look bright due to mistrust between the two countries. Russia said, “The last-minute extension of New START by Russia and the USA in February this year [authored 2021] was a relief, but the prospects for additional bilateral nuclear arms control between the nuclear superpowers remain poor” [21]. At NATO's annual Arms and Control Conference 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasized the dangerous world situation when he stated that “... the world is rapidly becoming more unpredictable. More competitive. And more dangerous” [23].

The key intergovernmental organization for world disarmament is the United Nations. At its disposal, the UN has permanent organizations not only in the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) [31], but also within the research institute the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)[32]. Besides its permanent organizations, the UN organizes conferences and seminars, as well as establishes commissions and committees on the subject of eliminating (or at least reducing) the nuclear weapons on earth.

The two United Nation disarmament treaties and the European Union member states' stance on them

The United Nations adopted two main treaties for the control and elimination of nuclear weapons: the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

The NPT went into force in 1970 and became a Treaty indefinitely in 1995. All UN members ratify NPT states except for four UN member states (India, Israel, Pakistan, and South Sudan-a country from 2011). This makes the NPT the most significant international law to curtail the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons technology and to advance the goal of achieving general nuclear disarmament and, ultimately, complete disarmament. The NPT gives the five permanent members of the UN Security Council-China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the USA-the exclusive rights to possess nuclear weapons, but the NPT also commits them to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament and to pursue a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control (Article VI of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)). Every five years, the NPT is reviewed. The failure to implement the results of the 2000 and 2010 reviews has been heavily criticized, as they failed to produce a final document of the review conferences of 2005 and 2015. The NPT conference of 2020 was postponed due to Covid-19.

On 7 July 2017, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The Secretary-General of the United Nations signed the Treaty on 20 September 2017. On 22 January 2021, the Treaty entered into force. (The Treaty went into force according to its Article 15 (1).)

The TPNW contains a comprehensive set of bans on participating in nuclear activities. These include commitments not to “develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, store, use or threaten with nuclear weapons.” Furthermore, the TPNW prohibits “the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any State in carrying out prohibited activities.” The ratified states are obliged to prevent and suppress all activities that are prohibited for a convention state under the TPNW. (Article 1 (1) of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).) In short, international law prohibits mentioned activities from the Treaty's inception.

By September 2025, 74 countries had ratified the Treaty, and another 21 countries had signed (but not ratified) the TPNW treaty. None of the nine known nuclear weapons states have signed the TPNW [19]. Nor have any of the 21 member states of NATO signed the TPNW. Three EU Member States (Austria, Ireland, and Malta) have ratified TPNW. The European Parliament expresses

a neutral position but doubts that TPNW can achieve its goal—a world free of nuclear weapons [7].

Many consider TPNW a historic Treaty that will free the world from nuclear weapons, the most destructive weapon ever produced. The positive view of TPNW is that it will strengthen international law and gradually lead to political opposition to nuclear weapons. The negative view of TPNW is that today, there are no conditions for disarmament, which is totally neglected by the proponents of TPNW. Critics also argue that TPNW would undermine the NPT.

NWFZs

The United Nations offers states the opportunity to establish so-called NWFZ in groups. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons gives groups of countries the right to establish specific zones free from nuclear weapons. (Article VII of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).) The NPT entered into force in 1970, and in 1975, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed this right and established the criteria for such zones. (Resolution 3472 (XXX) B (1975).) To be recognized as one of the United Nations NWFZ, a group of countries has to freely establish agreements where these countries follow the UN's rules of NWFZ. The UN Resolution defines a nuclear-weapon-free zone as "A 'nuclear-weapon-free zone' shall, as a general rule, be deemed to be any zone recognized as such by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which any group of States, in the free exercise of their sovereignty, has established under a treaty or convention whereby:

"(a) The statute of total absence of nuclear weapons to which the zone shall be subject, including the procedure for the delimitation of the zone, is defined; (b) An international system of verification and control is established to guarantee compliance with the obligations deriving from that statute." (Resolution 3472 (XXX) B (1975). Section I. Paragraph 1.)

Since 15 July 2009, when the African NWFZ entered into force, five continental NWFZs have included groups of countries. Furthermore, three NWFZs that control Antarctica, the seabed, and outer space are not part of any state. The five continental NWFZs cover 56% of the earth's land area, and 60% of the 193 UN member states are part of an NWFZ.

The UN Agenda 2030 and the elimination of nuclear weapons

On 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the historic resolution, the so-called Agenda 2030 [30]. Agenda 2030, with 17 global goals (SDGs) for sustainable development, aims to eradicate poverty and hunger, realize the human rights of all, achieve equality, and ensure lasting protection for the planet and its natural resources. Global goals are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: Economic, social, and environmental. All of the UN's 193 member states have signed and committed to working to achieve these goals.

While Agenda 2030 is more general about achieving a good and safer life, the UN is more explicit about nuclear weapons in the UNODA report: Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament. In the report, UNODA points out that today's nuclear weapons risks are unacceptably high and that they are growing. Much of this lies in the recent reluctance of the superpowers to negotiate disarmament and arms control. Technological developments also contribute to increasing the risks, including the potential vulnerability of nuclear weapons systems against cyberattacks. The continued development of missile systems with anti-satellite functions also increases the risks. Furthermore, weapons costs are enormous, where in 2017, more than one-eighth of the world's gross product was spent on global military spending, which is the highest level since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The world's disarmament work faces major challenges in that the armed conflicts are becoming more deadly, destructive, and complex. UNODA points out that the UN's work on disarmament is in a serious crisis.

What will the UN's future disarmament work look like? First, the UN will focus on establishing common standards, collecting data on security breaches, and sharing policies and best practices. Furthermore, according to UNODA, the UN will need to strengthen coordination to assist governments in assessing situations and to prevent overly broad interpretations of international law. The UN must also, in cooperation with experts, industry, and representatives of civil society, strive to build stronger commitment and deeper integration in the field of disarmament. UNODA emphasizes that the best way to preserve peace is to prevent major intergovernmental wars and to maintain stability in times of turbulence. In this regard, "the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations." [27].

DISCUSSION

Suggestions on how to make the European Union a nuclear-weapon-free-zone

The world community has been very active in debating the negative side of nuclear weapons the most devastating mass destructive weapon ever made. The consensus against nuclear weapons is that it poses a threat to all humanity and our planet. In 2017, a significant diplomatic disarmament breakthrough was the adoption of the TPNW at the United Nations. The Treaty was adopted, albeit with no recognition from any nuclear weapon states, which also hold most of the permanent places of the UN's Security Council. All disarmament initiatives in the Western world are blocked by these nuclear weapon states, which makes the direct action of disarmament in the Western world reduced to zero. However, hope is entrenched in human beings, even if that hope and progress are limited to small baby steps.

By suggesting a plan on how to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free European Union, my focus will only be on the European Union and only in peacetime. The peacetime-only aspect is important since it will not challenge the existing status quo. There are currently four EU member states that, in September 2025, hold US nuclear warheads.

In In September 2025, the the US is storing (all in underground vaults inside shelters) approximately 100 of the older B61-3 and 4 gravity bombs. These bombs are to be delivered by the US on the aircraft F-15E and F-16 and by NATO on the aircraft F-16 and PA-200. i.e., the bombs are transported to their destination by aircraft, which means they could be relocated outside Europe at peacetime and returned to Europe at other times. My proposal, accordingly, is that it should be possible to sanction nuclear weapons at a time of crisis when the parliaments of the member states will permit nuclear weapons to enter Europe. The purpose of my suggestion here is like the Undén proposal, which is not to disturb the existing military balance. These suggestions will hopefully please the military agenda while also making Europe safer when it comes to the accidental use of nuclear warheads. It will also give Europe a chance to experience a nuclear-weapon-free Europe. Hans M. Kristensen's point that the nuclear weapons in Europe have been "stored under unsafe conditions for more than two decades" is sobering, and it is unthinkable that European politicians would permit nuclear weapons to be stored unsafely on European soil.

My second suggestion is to make an exception for France. France is a superpower with an endemic belief that nuclear weapons protect sovereignty. The French belief is so firm that it will not be changed in the near future and should, therefore, be worked around to keep the march to a nuclear-weapon-free Europe in process.

Including my two suggestions, I have set out four aspects that form the basis for a nuclear-weapon-free European Union that considers the reality of modern Europe. The four positions are:

- The request for a nuclear-weapon-free European Union should only be valid in peacetime.
- At a time of severe threat, nuclear weapons may be brought into the territories that are member states of the European Union. But for nuclear-weapon to be brought in, parliamentary voting is required in respective countries.
- EU member state, France, may retain its current nuclear weapons program.
- A nuclear-weapon-free zone is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of responsible adaptation to an alternative of fear in the face of the possibility of human error.

The purpose of this proposal is to take a small step toward the larger goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world. My starting position is that the greatest risk of nuclear disaster arises from human error. Accordingly, the smaller the role and presence of nuclear weapons, the lower the likelihood that human error will lead to catastrophe.

This proposal should not be viewed as an attempt to disrupt the balance of world politics, in which NATO has a clear responsibility to its member states. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which forms the legal basis of NATO, stipulates that an armed attack against one member shall be considered an attack against all, and that the other members must assist the state under attack with all necessary means, including armed force. Rather, the proposal should be understood as a measure aimed at achieving a safer Europe.

CONCLUSION

In the spirit of the Swedish Foreign Minister Östen Undén, I suggest the European Union become "a Non-nuclear Club," where the member states declare their territory free from nuclear weapons, i.e., a NWFZ. Further, according to the Undén proposal, the insertion of a nuclear-weapon-free zone should not affect the military balance. The UN NWFZ Resolution requests that to be able to become a nuclear-weapon-free zone, the zone requires a "total absence of nuclear weapons". My suggestion, to some extent, is in opposition to the UN requirement, in that I suggest that a nuclear-weapon-free zone should ONLY be the "total absence of nuclear weapons" in peacetime, as opposed to times of conflict, and that respective parliaments must legislate the return of nuclear weapons to its respective territory, this so that the military balance should not be disrupted.

To increase the possibility of these measures, superpowers, such as France, with endemic beliefs that nuclear weapons protect sovereignty, should be accommodated.

Lastly, in addition to the points in the Undén proposal, my suggestion is in the spirit of the Kekkonen proposal, in that small countries must take the initiative when the superpowers are entrenched in an arms race.

My suggestion of a nuclear-weapon-free European Union may be a small baby step, but it should be a giant step for EUROPEAN mankind in that we will officially be living in a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

The UNODA estimates over 12,241 nuclear warheads worldwide in 2025 and that the best way to protect ourselves against the danger of nuclear weapons is disarmament.

REFERENCES

1. Bhreatnach, Aoife. "Frank Aiken: European Federation and United Nations Internationalism." *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 13, 2002, pp. 237-249.
2. Brodin, Katarina. "The Undén Proposal." *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1966, pp. 18-29.
3. Broms, Bengt. "Proposals to Establish a Nordic Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone." *Michigan Journal of International Law*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1989, pp. 345-361. CORE, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232703266.pdf>. Accessed 10 July 2025.
4. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. "The Effects of Nuclear Weapons." <https://cnduk.org/the-effects-of-nuclear-weapon/>. Accessed 10 July 2025.
5. de Gaulle, Charles. "Allocution prononcée au palais de l'Élysée, 19 avril 1963." *Discours et Messages*, vol. 4, Plon, 1970, p. 96.
6. Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Nuclear Weapon." <https://www.britannica.com/technology/nuclear-weapon>. Accessed 10 July 2025.
7. European Parliament. 2018. "The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: Impact and Prospects." European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) Briefing, October 2018. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614664/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614664_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614664/EPRS_BRI(2018)614664_EN.pdf). Accessed 7 July 2025.
8. Federation of American Scientists (FAS). 2021. "China Is Building a Second Nuclear Missile Silo Field." *FAS Security Blog*, July 26,

9. Federation of American Scientists (FAS). n.d. "Status of World Nuclear Forces." <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapon/status-world-nuclear-forces/>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
10. Hoffmann, Stanley, and Inge Hoffmann. 1968. "The Will to Grandeur: De Gaulle as Political Artist." *Daedalus* 97 (3): 829–87. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20023843>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
11. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). 2025. "TPNW Signature and Ratification Status." https://www.icanw.org/signature_and_ratification_status. Accessed July 10, 2025.
12. Joint Soviet–United States. 1985. "Joint Soviet–United States Statement on the Summit Meeting in Geneva." Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, November 21, 1985. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/joint-soviet-united-states-statement-summit-meeting-geneva>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
13. Jurgensen, Céline, and Dominique Mongin, eds. 2020. *France and Nuclear Deterrence: A Spirit of Resistance*. Recherches & Documents no. 01/2020. Paris: Fondation pour la recherche stratégique. <https://www.frstrategie.org/en/publications/recherches-et-documents/france-and-nuclear-deterrence-spirit-resistance-2020>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
14. Kristensen, Hans M. 2015. "Upgrades at US Nuclear Bases in Europe Acknowledge Security Risk." FAS Strategic Security Blog, September 10, 2015. <https://fas.org/publication/nuclear-insecurity/>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
15. Kristensen, Hans M., and Matt Korda. 2019. "French Nuclear Forces, 2019." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 75 (1): 51–55. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00963402.2019.1556003?needAccess=true>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
16. Macron, Emmanuel. 2017. "Speech on Defence and Deterrence Strategy." July 13, 2017. French Ministry of Armed Forces. <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/605304/10175711/file/strategie-update%202021.pdf>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
17. Maruzsa, Zoltán. 2008. "Denuclearization in Central Europe? The Rapacki Plan during the Cold War." *Öt kontinens*. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 225–64. https://www.atomwaffena-z.info/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/RapackiPlan_Maruzsa.pdf. Accessed July 10, 2025.
18. Melgaard, L., and Hans Moeller Kristensen. 1987. *Thule Accident 1968*. Copenhagen: Greenpeace Books and Records. ISBN 87-88807-037.
19. NATO. 2021. "NATO 2030: Strengthened Deterrence and Defense." NATO Factsheet, June 2021. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/6/pdf/2106-factsheet-nato2030-en.pdf. Accessed July 10, 2025.
20. Peyrefitte, Alain. 2002. *C'était de Gaulle*. Paris: Gallimard.
21. SIPRI. 2021. *SIPRI Yearbook 2020: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/global-nuclear-arsenals-grow-states-continue-modernize-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
22. Stocker, Jeremy. 2015. "Accepting Regional Zero: Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, U.S. Nonproliferation Policy and Global Security, 1957–1968." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17 (2): 36–72.
23. Stoltenberg, Jens. 2021. "Speech at the NATO Annual Arms Control Conference, Copenhagen." NATO, May 2021. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_186295.htm. Accessed July 10, 2025.
24. Tertrais, Bruno. "French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future: A Handbook". Paris: Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2020. <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/recherches-et-documents/2020/202004.pdf>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
25. The Guardian. 2015. "US to Clean Up Spanish Radioactive Site 49 Years after Palomares Plane Crash." October 19, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/19/us-to-clean-up-spanish-radioactive-site-49-years-after-palomares-plane-crash>.
26. Accessed July 10, 2025. United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). 2019. *Nuclear Risk Reduction: A Framework for Analysis*. Geneva: UNIDIR. <https://unidir.org/publication/nuclear-risk-reduction-framework-analysis>.
27. Accessed July 10, 2025. United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). 2023. *The Logic of Nuclear Deterrence: Assessments, Assumptions, Uncertainties and Failure Modes (Paper 3)*. Geneva: UNIDIR.
28. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). 2018. *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. Foreword by António Guterres. New York: United Nations. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf#view=Fit>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
29. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). 2018. *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. New York: United Nations. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf#view=Fit>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
30. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). n.d. "Nuclear Weapons." United Nations. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/>. Accessed July 10, 2025.
31. United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. New York: United Nations. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Resolution_A_RES_70_1_EN.pdf. Accessed July 10, 2025.
32. Wellerstein, Alex. 2014. "Tweet, December 15, 2014." Twitter. <https://twitter.com/wellerstein/status/544584712896131072>. Accessed July 10, 2025.

*It should be noted that the author of this article, Oscar Brunzell, is a distant relative of the former Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Östen Undén. Oscar's father's great grandfather Theodor Kaijser was the older brother of Beata Kaijser, the mother of Östen Undén.

Mr. Undén, a pioneer advocate for a reduction in the spread of nuclear weapons, presented, in 1961 at the United Nations General Assembly, the so-called Undén proposal outlining that a club of states without nuclear weapons should pledge never to produce nuclear weapons (and never to receive nuclear weapons into their territory). The Undén proposal is formulated in UN resolution 1664 (XVI).