

The EU and the Transformed Nuclear Context since the War in Ukraine

by Clara Portela



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ABSTRACT

The invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022 has entirely transformed the European security landscape, bringing war to the European Union's doorstep. Importantly, the war features a nuclear dimension that manifests itself in consequential ways, including Moscow's nuclear sabre-rattling and its denunciation of the last surviving nuclear arms control treaty. This unleashed intriguing reactions, like a surprisingly tough resort to sanctions by the EU, or the shrinking of neutrality on the continent. However, while support for nuclear deterrence has increased in some NATO countries, support for arms control remains strong too. Meanwhile, nuclear disarmament advocates have not shifted their stance as a result of the crisis.

European Union | Russia | NATO | Finland | Sweden | Arms control | Nuclear weapons

keywords

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Introduction

Although debates about the Western response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 typically centre on the supply of military equipment, the refugee and humanitarian crisis, and Kyiv's European Union membership bid, the conflict also features a nuclear military dimension. This was evident from the start, when the security assurances provided to Kyiv in exchange for giving up on Soviet-era nuclear weapons left on its territory in the context of the non-binding Budapest Memorandum of 1994, one of the main diplomatic endeavours towards nuclear de-proliferation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union,¹ were violated. Awkwardly, the Kremlin's justification for the attack alluded, among other issues, to Ukraine's ability to produce nuclear weapons thanks to the technological capacity inherited from the Soviet Union.²

But it was, above all, the more or less explicit threats of nuclear-weapons use issued repeatedly throughout 2022 by Russia's leaders – notably President Vladimir Putin himself – that commanded the most attention from media and policy circles. No less than 165 "interactions with a nuclear dimension" were observed in the course of barely one year.³ What impact are such actions having on European security? How will the transformed environment emerging after the shock of the invasion

¹ Virginia I. Foran and Leonard S. Spector, "The Application of Incentives to Nuclear Proliferation", in David Cortright (ed.), *The Price of Peace. Incentives and International Conflict Prevention*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, p. 21-53.

² See Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

³ Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt, "Nuclear Signalling in Russia's War Against Ukraine", in *CSDS Policy Briefs*, No. 5/2023 (22 February 2023), p. 1, <https://csds.vub.be/node/1317>.

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of Ukraine, in turn, affect prospects for nuclear deterrence, arms control and disarmament in Europe? With these questions in mind, the present paper addresses the possibility of nuclear-weapons use and its impact on European public attitudes towards nuclear deterrence, the shrinking of neutrality as a security policy and the abandonment of bilateral arms control between the United States and Russia. A brief overview of consequences for the EU, and for the role it can play in the resulting security situation, concludes the paper.

1. Russian threats of nuclear-weapons use

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian officials have repeatedly alluded to a possible use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine. First and foremost, the key purpose of such allusions was to prevent direct Western military intervention in Ukraine. Russian officials warned that a direct clash between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russian forces could lead to a nuclear escalation. The fact that such statements were particularly frequent at the outset of the war, underlines the pre-eminence of this purpose. Secondly, such nuclear posturing was intended to limit Western support for Ukraine. Russian officials occasionally highlighted the fact that the provision of certain types of assistance to Kyiv would transform NATO into a direct party to the conflict, which entailed the risk of a direct nuclear clash.⁴ However, the language of such statements tended to be vague – and the government frequently retracted them, blaming Western misinterpretation.

The effectiveness of such nuclear sabre-rattling remains contentious. Some posit that it compelled the US to show restraint, as reflected in the White House's insistence that it would not intervene directly in the Russia–Ukraine war, as well as other Western officials' public rejection of intervention citing nuclear-escalation concerns. In March 2022, the White House announced that it would not interfere directly in the Russia–Ukraine war and, when Russia declared it had put its nuclear forces on alert, plans to supply Ukraine with aircraft were cancelled.⁵ In October 2022, US President Joe Biden declared that, for the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world was facing “a direct threat of the use of the nuclear weapon if, in fact, things continue down the path they've been going”.⁶ However, alternative explanations hold equally well: Western decision-makers might have refrained from intervention out of sheer risk-averseness. Western actors have, after all, not been characterised by an eagerness to get involved in extensive

⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵ Julian Borger and Patrick Wintour, “US Dismisses Polish Plan to Provide Fighter Jets to Be Sent to Ukraine”, in *The Guardian*, 9 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/p/yx9yt>.

⁶ White House, *Remarks by President Biden at Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Reception*, New York, 6 October 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/10/06/remarks-by-president-biden-at-democratic-senatorial-campaign-committee-reception>. See also Carlos Torralba, María R. Sahuquillo and Macarena Vidal Liy, “Putin's Nuclear Threats: Should the West Take Them Seriously?”, in *El País*, 9 October 2022, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-10-09/putins-nuclear-threats-should-the-west-take-them-seriously.html>.

military operations after the costly and largely inconclusive interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya. Indeed, US presidents from Barack Obama to Joe Biden have been openly reticent about interventionism. The debacle of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in summer 2021 epitomises the US reluctance over any overseas force deployment. From that vantage point, a Western intervention in Ukraine would have been unlikely – particularly in the absence of an Article 5-type security guarantee that could compromise the credibility of the Atlantic Alliance. In fact, the absence of NATO membership does not preclude the unilateral offering of nuclear security guarantees to Ukraine; yet, this has not been contemplated either. Instead, Western countries have opted for supporting Ukraine via weapons transfers, intelligence gathering and military training. The US has reacted to Russia's hints that this kind of support could elicit use of nuclear weapons. For instance, former US general David Petraeus warned in October 2022 that the likely response to Russian nuclear escalation would be a sweeping attack which would destroy Russia's troops and equipment in Ukraine as well as sinking its Black Sea fleet: "we would respond by leading a NATO, a collective effort, that would take out every Russian conventional force that we can see and identify on the battlefield in Ukraine and also in Crimea and every ship in the Black Sea".⁷ While it is impossible to know whether this is indeed the Biden Administration's policy, senior officials – namely National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and CIA Director Bill Burns – are known to have warned the Russians that any move involving nuclear weapons would have very serious consequences for Russia.

Be that as it may, there is consensus around the idea that nuclear sabre-rattling has seemingly undermined the "taboo" on the use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear posturing dovetails with the introduction in the Russian nuclear doctrine of the notion of "existential threat", a term largely undefined, as a possible justification for nuclear use.⁸ The most recent doctrinal document, the "Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence" of 2020, spells out that nuclear use is geared at preventing the "escalation of military actions and their termination on conditions that are acceptable for the Russian Federation".⁹ Furthermore, it accommodates two scenarios for nuclear-weapons use: a "launch on warning" posture based on credible information about the launching of ballistic missiles towards Russian territory, and an attack by an adversary against critical governmental or military sites whose disruption "would undermine nuclear force

⁷ "'This Week' Transcript 10-2-22: FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell, Sen. Marco Rubio & Gen. David Petraeus", in *ABC News*, 2 October 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=90870039>. See also Edward Helmore, "Petraeus: US Would Destroy Russia's Troops if Putin Uses Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine", in *The Guardian*, 2 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/p/mcct4>.

⁸ Russian Presidency, *Vojennaja doktrina Rossijskoj Federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 February 2010, point 16, <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/461>. For an unofficial English translation see the Carnegie Endowment website: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf.

⁹ Russian Presidency, *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence*, 2 June 2020, point 4, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/1434131.

response actions”.¹⁰ Thus, conventional attacks with potential impact on nuclear-weapons systems are covered under the scenarios that may give rise to a nuclear response.

Interestingly, Russian warnings about nuclear use have also been accompanied by simultaneous accusations of nuclear threats allegedly directed against Moscow. Highlighting the fact that Ukraine retains “the nuclear technologies created back in the Soviet times”, the presidential address of February 2022 claimed that

If Ukraine acquires weapons of mass destruction, the situation [...] will drastically change, especially for us, for Russia. We cannot but react to this real danger, all the more so since [...] Ukraine’s Western patrons may help it acquire these weapons to create yet another threat to our country.¹¹

Similarly, Russian media spread the (false) news in January 2023 that Sweden was planning to allow the deployment of NATO nuclear weapons – a notion dismissed by the Swedish prime minister, Ulf Kristersson.¹² Thus, despite the fact that doctrinal instruments cover the option of nuclear use in response to conventional challenges, an attempt is made to justify the threat with the help of “equalising” circumstances of purported nuclear danger.

2. More sanctions, less neutrality

The European reaction to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has taken various forms. And one is that the EU has adopted an unusually robust sanctions policy, closely coordinated with G7 partners.¹³ The threat of sanctions by a Western alliance that coincides almost exactly with NATO membership was originally meant to have a deterrent effect, as Russia was warned about this if it indeed had invaded. However, the deterrent effect against potential military aggression was compromised by several factors.

To begin with, sanctions threats cannot be spelt out too specifically, given that their announcement can preclude their effectiveness by granting the target time to prepare for the measures to come. Secondly, the threat of sanctions is less potent than that of military force because they can be circumvented and evaded, an option unavailable with force. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that sanctions take a long time to display their effects, undermine their deterrent potential, as

¹⁰ Ibid., point 19.

¹¹ Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2022, cit.

¹² Georgi Gotev, “Swedish PM Warns against Russian ‘Nuclear’ Propaganda”, in *Euractiv*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1863535>.

¹³ Clara Portela and Janis Kluge, “Slow-acting Tools. Evaluating EU Sanctions against Russia after the Invasion of Ukraine”, in *EUISS Briefs*, No. 11 (November 2022), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2825>.

the aggressor is reassured that its actions will not meet any resistance greater than economic bans. The reliance on sanctions, however severe they may be, confirms that the option of a military intervention in support of a non-NATO ally remained as unpalatable to European political elites as to the US leadership.

Another form of reaction to the invasion has been the shrinking of neutrality as a security policy. This development has found its most drastic manifestation in Finland and Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership shortly after the outbreak of the war. Even the persistence of the commitment to neutrality in Moldova is in question, as public debate about a possible application to join NATO is currently under way.¹⁴ Some reconsideration of the obligations arising from neutrality has penetrated public debates even in Switzerland and Austria, with regard to such questions as the re-export of military equipment or participation in sanctions efforts.¹⁵

Since Finnish and Swedish neutrality policy, unlike that of the neutrals in central Europe, was never constitutionally enshrined, it could be abandoned easily. The persistence of neutrality had remained contested among post-Cold War elites in both Nordic countries – especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea heightened the threat perception in both.¹⁶ Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, popular support for NATO accession became a majority position. Although the trigger for Helsinki's and Stockholm's NATO applications was primarily the Russian conventional attack on Ukraine, the accompanying nuclear threat meant to preclude intervention by third parties increased the perception of vulnerability and exposure in Sweden and Finland, which ceased to regard neutrality as a protection policy. Interestingly, those countries that are not yet EU members and whose NATO membership is not on the table have intensified their efforts to join the EU – a move that Brussels reciprocated by fast-tracking their candidate status. Moldova was granted EU candidate status alongside Ukraine in June 2022, a mere three months after filing their applications.¹⁷

The question now is: What will the consequences for European security be? The Nordics' accession to the Atlantic Alliance, along with Moldova's reconsideration of neutrality, dramatically shrinks the space outside of Alliance commitments or aspirations: in Europe's continental landmass, only Switzerland and Austria remain neutral. With the Nordics' change of status, gone are the roles that neutrality had fulfilled since the Cold War era: avoiding direct borders between adversaries and keeping tensions low around the Baltic Sea. Despite claims declaring neutrality

¹⁴ Suzanne Lynch, "Time to Join NATO? Moldova Eyes Joining 'a Larger Alliance'", in *Politico*, 20 January 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=2536740>.

¹⁵ Constanze Stelzenmüller, "Ukraine Crisis Could Transform the Future of Neutrality", in *Financial Times*, 22 November 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/2ddad5db-3500-44b9-a93e-d5ca40c7409e>.

¹⁶ Leo Michel and Matti Pesu, "Strategic Deterrence Redux. Nuclear Weapons and European Security", in *FIIA Reports*, No. 60 (September 2019), <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/strategic-deterrence-redux>.

¹⁷ European Council, *Conclusions, 23-24 June 2022*, <https://europa.eu/!TCKrrj>.

“obsolete”,¹⁸ this may have negative consequences for European (and broadly Western) global nuclear diplomacy. Both Finland and Sweden – particularly the latter – acted as long-standing disarmament advocates capable of building bridges across intra-European divides and between Europeans and the Global South in the context of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Past efforts in this regard resulted in the launch of the first EU Strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in 2003 – spearheaded by Sweden to soften the rift created by the US–UK invasion of Iraq, which was initially justified on counter-proliferation grounds. Most recently, Sweden convened the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament – a move that was, again, intended to reconstitute a European consensus around the matter in the face of deepening polarisation in the attitudes of EU member states towards nuclear deterrence.¹⁹ However, in the context of Sweden’s bid to join NATO, Stockholm has de-facto ceased to lead the initiative.

Although the direction in which these countries will evolve is open, two main options are plausible: one scenario is that they align with NATO member states’ policies on non-proliferation issues.²⁰ Tellingly, Finland and Sweden abstained from voting on the resolution promoting the universalisation of the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2020, but voted against in 2021 and 2022. This is significant because United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions promoting the TPNW have been vehemently opposed by NATO members. If this option materialises and the Nordics fall into line, the EU will lose much of its bridge-building ability in the global nuclear non-proliferation complex. In an alternative scenario, the Finnish and Swedish position on nuclear weapons could be one of continuity, in an attempt to keep the Baltic Sea a low-tension area. They might retain their deep-seated disarmament credentials, remaining outside the mainstream of NATO and would keep providing the EU with a bridge-building “Nordic cluster” along with Norway.

3. The demise of bilateral nuclear-arms control between the US and Russia

A further consequence of the Ukraine war is the demise of bilateral nuclear-arms control between the US and Russia. The network of treaties between the two countries limiting nuclear weaponry witnessed Washington’s withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, citing Russian non-compliance.

¹⁸ Franz-Stefan Gady, “Why Neutrality Is Obsolete in the 21st Century”, in *Foreign Policy*, 4 April 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/04/finland-sweden-nato-neutral-austria-ireland-switzerland-russia-war>.

¹⁹ Michal Onderco and Clara Portela, “NATO’s Nordic Enlargement and Nuclear Disarmament: The End of Bridge Building?”, in *War on the Rocks*, 20 February 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/?p=28287>.

²⁰ Robin Forsberg, Aku Kähkönen and Jason Moyer, “If Finland Joins NATO, It Needs a New Nuclear Weapons Policy”, in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 8 December 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/?p=102005>.

Only the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) survived – and that only after it was extended at the eleventh hour, in February 2021, for a period of five years.²¹ Initially, implementation of New START remained unaltered despite the invasion of Ukraine. However, one year into the war, Russia announced it would suspend the application of New START's verification procedures on the ground that it was now unacceptable to have US officials inspect Russian nuclear sites. The suspension of the verification system was justified with reference to

connection between strategic offensive weapons [the kind of weapons limited by New START] and, say, the conflict in Ukraine or other hostile Western actions against our country. [...] They [the West] want to inflict a strategic defeat on us and also to get to our nuclear sites.²²

The decision was criticised for fostering instability due to the loss of confidence-building mechanisms and the information exchange foreseen in the treaty,²³ which is likely to result in an upgrade of US capabilities as a response to Washington's increased threat perception.²⁴ Despite the announced suspension, hopes remain for a full restoration of the treaty. The suspension is reported to be effected under *clausula rebus sic stantibus*, a figure that allows states to denounce international obligations on the basis that circumstances changed fundamentally since they first acceded to the treaty. The invocation of this clause is invariably controversial, since it is used to justify a non-consensual withdrawal from of a treaty. Moreover, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which regulates the *clausula rebus sic stantibus*, stipulates that during a period of suspension, the parties shall refrain from acts tending to obstruct the resumption of the operation of the treaty.²⁵

The recent announcement of the (re-)deployment of Russian nuclear weapons to Belarus after these had been handed over to Russia following the breakup of the Soviet Union has added yet another layer to the nuclear dimension of the Ukraine conflict.²⁶ Nevertheless, despite a deteriorating security climate characterised by ongoing bellicosity, the negotiation of a new arms-control treaty is still considered viable by some authors. Leading Ukrainian expert Polina Sinovets proposes to use

²¹ Clara Portela, "The EU's Arms Control Challenge. Bridging Nuclear Divides", in *Chaillot Papers*, No. 166 (April 2021), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2571>.

²² Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565>.

²³ John Mecklin, "Jon Wolfstahl Assesses the Suspension of Russian Participation in New START", in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 21 February 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/?p=102846>.

²⁴ Lydia Wachs, "New Start vor dem Aus? Rüstungskontrolle als Teil Moskaus nuklearer Erpressungsstrategie", in *SWP Kurz gesagt*, 3 March 2023, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/new-start-vor-dem-aus-ruestungskontrolle-als-teil-moskaus-nuklearer-erpressungsstrategie>.

²⁵ Rose Gottemoeller and Marshall L. Brown Jr., "Legal Aspects of Russia's New START Suspension Provide Opportunities for US Policy Makers", in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2 March 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/?p=102976>.

²⁶ "Russia Signs Deal to Deploy Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Belarus", in *Al Jazeera*, 25 May 2023, <https://aje.io/49mj51>.

arms control as a method for de-escalating the conflict, positing that both parties continue to have an interest in the reduction of certain categories of weapons, such as cruise missiles, in a scenario in which the blueprint of the INF could be replicated.²⁷ Moreover, in spite of the heightened risk perception, public opinion in Western Europe remains remarkably favourable to new arms-control endeavours, in contrast to public opinion in the US or Russia.²⁸ However, because bilateral arms control is a Washington–Moscow business, European governments remain less vocal about this.

4. Implications for the EU: An unchanged script?

Notwithstanding the strains that the war in Ukraine has put on the EU, Brussels institutions have seized the opportunity to bolster their security relevance. This role has manifested itself primarily in the mobilisation of funds to finance weapons deliveries by means of the Peace Facility and, above all, the adoption of a remarkably far-reaching sanctions effort. These actions have afforded Commission President Ursula von der Leyen the occasion of constructing the “geopolitical Commission” she had advocated for since her inauguration.²⁹ In nuclear deterrence and arms-control questions, however, the Atlantic Alliance remains the preeminent forum. Despite continued efforts to frame a common EU stance on nuclear issues since the release of the Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD Strategy), intra-European disagreements over the role of nuclear deterrence have prevented a shift from NATO to the EU. The EU has traditionally been divided into two camps. One of them composed of NATO members that accepts nuclear deterrence, and that notably includes nuclear weapons states France and, until 2019, also the UK. The second camp is composed of disarmament advocates, typically neutral states. The cleavage has not narrowed much over time: instead, a recent study of EU member states’ alignment on disarmament questions at the UN General Assembly and the NPT Review Conferences reveals a deepening cleavage between EU members that are concurrently NATO allies, on the one hand, and disarmament advocates, on the other.³⁰ As recalled above, Finland and Sweden are the only countries still occupying a middle position between both

²⁷ Polina Sinovets, “Nuclear Posturing in Russia’s War with Ukraine: ‘Offensive Deterrence’ in Progress”, in Marc Ozawa (ed.), “War Changes Everything: Russia after Ukraine”, in *NDC Research Papers*, No. 28 (February 2023), p. 27-37, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=792>.

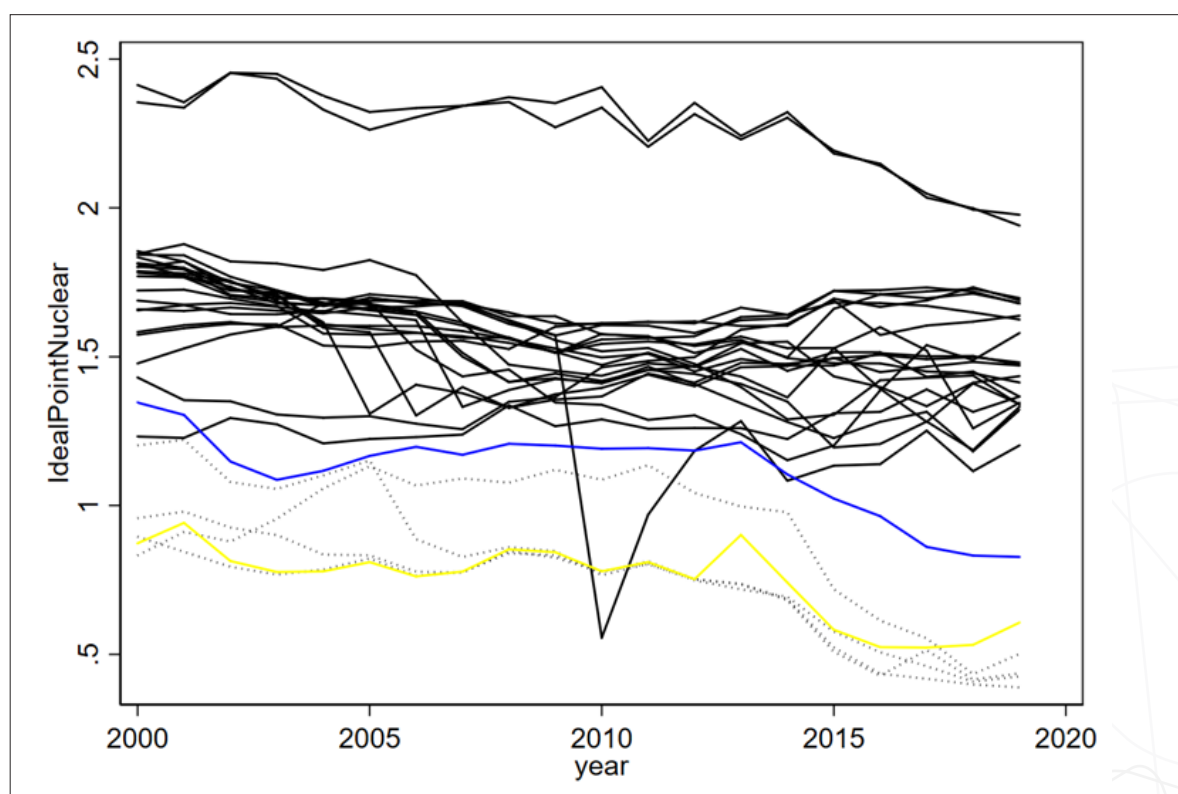
²⁸ Michal Onderco, Michal Smetana and Tom W. Etienne, “Hawks in the Making? European Public Views on Nuclear Weapons Post-Ukraine”, in *Global Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 2023), p. 305-317, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13179>.

²⁹ European Commission, *Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary on the Occasion of the Presentation of Her College of Commissioners and Their Programme*, Strasbourg, 27 November 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6408.

³⁰ Michal Onderco and Clara Portela, “External Drivers of EU Differentiated Cooperation: How Change in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime Affects Member States Alignment”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2023), p. 150-175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2146336>.

groups – as displayed in Figure 1. The graph displays ideal points, which estimate the distance between stances of different countries in a policy area, based on their voting behaviour on resolutions about nuclear weapons at the United Nations General Assembly.³¹ The graph includes all EU member states between 2000 and 2020, with the top lines depicting the nuclear weapons states, central lines representing NATO members, and dotted lines showing disarmament advocates. The evolution of the Nordics, with Finland coloured in blue and Sweden in yellow, is noteworthy. Sweden used to be among the most vocal disarmament supporters, but in recent years it has moved slightly closer to the NATO mainstream while other disarmament advocates moved further away from them. Finland, originally close to NATO member, gradually became more favourable to disarmament. By 2020, it had become the only country half-way through between the NATO mainstream and pro-disarmament members, positioned between the bulk of NATO countries and the nuclear advocates.

Figure 1 | Evolution of EU member states voting on nuclear resolutions at UNGA, 2000–20



Note: top lines=nuclear weapons states; central lines=NATO members; dotted lines=disarmament advocates; blue line=Finland; yellow line=Sweden.
 Source: Own elaboration from Michal Onderco and Clara Portela, “External Drivers of EU Differentiated Cooperation”, cit., p. 161.

³¹ Ideal points use a computational algorithm to estimate positions of actors on a single axis based on the results of many votes.

Conclusions

Russia's continued nuclear sabre-rattling is unlikely to affect the intra-European cleavage over disarmament. This is not because EU members underestimate the disquieting prospect of a potential nuclear attack but because each "camp" has drawn opposite conclusions from the crisis: most NATO allies regard the Alliance's nuclear deterrence posture as the only guarantee against nuclear blackmail, while disarmament advocates see the increased likelihood of use as a reason to step up abolitionist efforts. This is a key point as the war has not compelled EU member states to approximate their positions.

Popular support for disarmament is decreasing, a development that could eventually erode the intra-European divide on the issue. Interestingly, a recent survey of public attitudes towards nuclear deterrence and disarmament among the traditionally anti-nuclear populations in the Netherlands and Germany recorded a notable increase in support for nuclear deterrence following the invasion of Ukraine, accompanied by a corresponding drop in support for nuclear disarmament.³² More than half of respondents in both the Netherlands and Germany believe that the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory deters nuclear attacks on NATO countries.³³

Although signs of arms-control optimism among the European public may create the political conditions for action on this front, the latest NATO Strategic Concept suggests that for the time being it is not shared by foreign-policy elites.³⁴ In sum, although we are unlikely to see a convergence in the overall stance of EU member states on nuclear deterrence and disarmament, the rate of acceptance of nuclear deterrence among the public has increased considerably. As a result, continued polarisation between EU members remains the most likely scenario.

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³² Michal Onderco, Michal Smetana and Tom W. Etienne, "Hawks in the Making?", cit.

³³ Ibid., p. 309.

³⁴ William Alberque, "The New NATO Strategic Concept and the End of Arms Control", in *IISS Online Analysis*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis//2022/06/the-new-nato-strategic-concept-and-the-end-of-arms-control>.

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