

Tension Relief and Risk Reduction. For Conventional and Nuclear Disarmament Policy Paper on the War in Ukraine by IPPNW Germany

“Arms control can help reduce the risk of escalation and limit the potential for destruction. Furthermore, if successful, it can also help conserve resources by certain weapons systems become redundant if the opposing side is also willing to do without them. This point is particularly relevant given the enormously high costs of the planned military buildup in the coming years.”

Dr. Max Mutschler, Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies

Recommendations

- The German government and the EU should launch their own diplomatic initiatives to end the war in Ukraine and take steps to (re)activate disarmament treaties.
- Germany should advocate for the appointment of an EU Special Envoy for Ukraine and Russia.
- The German government should advocate for the immediate establishment of a demilitarized UN protection zone around the occupied Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, as well as for a general ban on military attacks on nuclear facilities.
- The German government should not station medium-range weapons in Germany and should halt European projects to develop its own European hypersonic weapons and cruise missiles.
- Germany should advocate for a moratorium on extending the New START treaty to reduce strategic nuclear weapons.
- The German government should urge the nuclear-weapon states to refrain from the first use of nuclear weapons and to remove nuclear weapons from the highest state of alert.

- Germany should advocate for the negotiation of comprehensive successor agreements to the INF Treaty to prevent a new arms race. A first step would be a moratorium on the deployment of land-based intermediate-range weapons in Europe.
- The German government should urge the nuclear-weapon states to establish specific and time-bound disarmament measures in accordance with their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).
- Germany should work to ensure that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) enters into force and firmly reject any plans for new nuclear tests.
- The German government, together with European partners, should advocate with the United States for the “Treaty on Open Skies.”
- The German government should participate as an observer in the Review Conference of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), to be held in New York from November 30 to December 4, 2026, and take steps toward signing the treaty.
- The German government should advocate for a pan-European nuclear-weapon-free zone that includes Russia.

We need a change in strategy regarding Ukraine!

With this paper, IPPNW aims to contribute to a shift in policy: away from the escalation of armaments and toward diplomacy and a policy of détente. In doing so, we address fundamental questions of diplomacy, negotiations, and disarmament treaties and develop recommendations for the German government.

The global situation is highly unstable, and the war in Ukraine plays a significant role in this. This war cannot be won militarily. Every day, hundreds of people on both sides are killed or seriously injured. There are currently hardly any changes in the front lines, while Russia is intensifying its bombardment of Ukrainian cities and Ukraine is launching drone attacks deep into Russian territory.

German politicians and officials from the EU and NATO are responding to Russian nuclear threats exclusively with plans for massive conventional rearmament and intensified cooperation on nuclear deterrence. Proposals to establish channels of dialogue with Russia—which could lead, in the medium to long term, to arms control, disarmament, and the establishment of a new European security architecture—are being strictly rejected.

1) Risk of Escalation and the Security Dilemma

The peace organization IPPNW advocates for a change in strategy by the German federal government, NATO, and the EU regarding their policy on Ukraine and calls for an end to the diplomatic deadlock. The humanitarian consequences of the war are severe. According to a study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in the war in Ukraine—which has been ongoing for more than four years—a total of more than two million soldiers on both sides have been killed, wounded, or reported missing.¹ Russia's attack on Ukraine is, was, and remains a violation of international law. The Russian government bears responsibility for the war. However, for Germany to seriously assume responsibility for restoring peace, it is not enough to rely on military buildup and sanctions.

Politicians and the media are increasingly narrowing the discourse to focus exclusively on military and violent solutions to conflicts. In doing so, the German government is limiting its strategic room for maneuver—both with regard to negotiations in Russia's war against Ukraine, issues of disarmament and arms control, and with regard to budgetary flexibility. The current massive rearmament does not lead to greater security; on the contrary, it intensifies military tensions, provokes a dangerous arms race, and increases the general risk of war. This also heightens the danger of escalation into a nuclear war. Just how real this danger is is demonstrated by reports in the New York Times from March 2024, according to which the U.S. had taken precautions in 2022 for a possible Russian nuclear strike in Ukraine.²

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), nearly all nuclear-weapon states are modernizing their nuclear arsenals by upgrading existing weapons and adding newer versions.³ According to media reports, the new planned U.S. nuclear strategy even considers the use of tactical nuclear weapons with shorter ranges.⁴

¹ Russian Blood and Treasure: The Soaring Costs of Putin's War, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-blood-and-treasure-ballooning-costs-putins-war>

² Biden's Armageddon Moment: When a Nuclear Detonation Seemed Possible in Ukraine <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/09/us/politics/biden-nuclear-russia-ukraine.html>

³ SIPRI Yearbook 2026, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2026/increasing-focus-nuclear-weapons-amid-heightened-escalation-risks-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>

⁴ Pentagon drafting a new U.S. nuclear strategy in case of regional war with China or Russia, sources say <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pentagon-drafting-new-us-nuclear-strategy-case-regional-war-china-russ-rcna587370>

With Ukrainian drones flying over NATO territory in the Baltic states, the increasing mutual attacks on civilian infrastructure via so-called “deep strikes,” and the German government’s involvement through its “strategic partnership” with Ukraine—which includes joint arms projects—the risk of escalation in the war in Ukraine is rising dramatically. A misunderstanding, stray missiles, or deliberate disruptive maneuvers could trigger an alliance response.

This arms buildup leads to what is known as a “security dilemma.” In international relations theory, this concept describes a paradoxical situation in which measures taken by one state to increase its own security are interpreted by other states as a threat, thereby sparking an arms race. Political scientist Daniel Marwecki writes in his book **What Comes After the West?**:⁵ “Since Donald Trump’s reelection, the European NATO countries seem to have been gripped by an arms race frenzy. According to SIPRI, European NATO members have invested over three trillion U.S. dollars in their military over the past decade.”

2) Historical Policy of Détente as a Model

The policy of détente under Egon Bahr and Willy Brandt was based on the principle of a peace-oriented policy, derived from Kennedy’s “Strategy for Peace.” This approach involved the ability to shift perspectives, to take the opponent’s interests into account, and to establish verifiable confidence-building measures. These principles made the policy of détente successful.

Anatol Lieven, director of the Eurasia Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, believes the time has come for realistic negotiations. Neither Russia nor Ukraine can win the war.⁶ In his essay, Lieven focuses on the respective interests of Russia and Ukraine and points out the possible consequences of failing to assert their respective interests. He also addresses the fear among EU countries that Russia might send its troops toward the Baltic states once the war in Ukraine ends. In doing so, he points out the “extreme vulnerability of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, which is surrounded by NATO countries”—a fact that is virtually never mentioned in German discussions on the topic.

In its proposals, IPPNW focuses on the areas of (nuclear) disarmament, arms control, and confidence-building measures. Therefore, the following section applies instruments of disarmament and arms control to the current global

⁵ Daniel Marwecki, “What Comes After the West,” Aufbau Verlag, 2025

⁶ Le Monde diplomatique, July 2026: Anatol Lieven: Is Europe Resisting Peace?

situation and compiles and presents proposals and recommendations for reducing tensions and mitigating risks. At the international level, IPPNW engages in discussions with diplomats and scholars from Russia and China on nuclear disarmament and arms control.

3) Current Opportunities for Negotiation

From a purely statistical standpoint, negotiations represent the most likely path to a lasting end to a war. In many conflicts, negotiations have already taken place while the war was still ongoing. This is also in the best interest of the people of Ukraine right now, to prevent further loss of life and the continued destruction of Ukraine. During the negotiations between Ukrainian and Russian negotiating teams in Istanbul in March 2022, the parties to the conflict were already relatively close to reaching a negotiated peace. Various factors contributed to the failure of those negotiations. However, the Istanbul Agreement shows that negotiations are possible.⁷

The UN Charter not only prohibits the invasion of other states but also calls for a peaceful resolution of armed conflicts. The 2+4 Treaty, to which Germany owes its reunification, mandates in its preamble and Article 2 effective measures for arms control and confidence-building, as well as “that only peace shall emanate from German soil.” The current militarization of society and the adherence to nuclear deterrence stand in contradiction to the necessary de-escalation.

There are several proposals for ending the war in Ukraine that the German government and the EU could draw upon. For example, they could take up the Sino-Brazilian proposals from 2024, which are supported by Switzerland. Among other things, these proposals identified the rejection of the use of nuclear weapons, the avoidance of attacks on civilian targets, and the resolution of the humanitarian crisis as key aspects of a peaceful solution. Furthermore, they condemn the use of weapons of mass destruction and attacks on nuclear facilities. Every possible effort must be made to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to avert a nuclear crisis.⁸ In October 2024, Ukraine criticized the plan for ignoring territorial integrity and effectively freezing Russia’s territorial gains⁹. However, compromises based on these plans might

⁷ IPPNW paper “Ceasefire and Peace for Ukraine,” a collection of existing proposals and possible steps to end the war in Ukraine, November 2024, https://www.ippnw.de/commonFiles/pdfs/Frieden/Waffenstillstand_und_Frieden_UkraineConflict.pdf

⁸ Ibid., p. 12

⁹ Ukraine Angry Over Switzerland’s Position on Peace Plan, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/russlands-angriffskrieg-ukraine-veraergert-ueber-schweizer-position-zu-friedensplan-a-d1e99af2-e86c-439c-87b9-dd655923e1b8>

be possible, though they have been categorically rejected by the German government to this day.

4) Demilitarized Zones around Nuclear Facilities

The external power supply to the Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is repeatedly threatened or interrupted by fighting in the surrounding area. On August 1 and again on August 4, 2026, the plant briefly lost connection to its only remaining power line, according to the IAEA. In both cases, the site's available emergency diesel generators were automatically activated and powered the plant's critical safety systems, including those for reactor cooling. This brought the total number of reported incidents since the start of the conflict to 24. Twelve of these occurred in the last four months alone.¹⁰

IPPNW calls on the German government to advocate for the immediate establishment of a demilitarized UN protection zone around the occupied Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, as well as for a general ban on military attacks on nuclear facilities.

5) EU Special Envoy for Ukraine

In mid-May 2026, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy publicly called on EU member states to appoint their own representative for peace negotiations. He argues that Europe must have a visible and independent voice in negotiations on the future of the European security order. In Germany, Armin Laschet, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, has spoken out in favor of an EU Special Envoy for Russia. Europe should represent its own positions and not communicate exclusively through the U.S. Direct contacts with Moscow are better than an indirect “game of telephone” via American mediators. However, the EU has not yet appointed a chief negotiator for potential Ukraine peace talks with Russia, as leading member states—including Germany—rejected the proposal in late May 2026.¹¹

IPPNW also advocates for the appointment of an EU special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, as any potential outcomes of negotiations regarding the war in

¹⁰ Update 361 – IAEA Director General's Statement on the Situation in Ukraine, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/update-361-iaea-director-general-statement-on-situation-in-ukraine>

¹¹ EU Will Not Appoint a Special Envoy for Talks with Putin, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/ukrainekrieg-eu-ernennt-keinen-sondergesandten-fuer-gespraeche-mit-t-a-6ed4da93-99f0-4bb5-9a76-ddea507b9e1>

Ukraine have significant implications for the security of Germany and Europe. EU member states are directly affected by the war and should therefore not merely be spectators or supporters, but should take a seat at the negotiating table themselves. A special envoy could convey European proposals directly to the Russian government, rather than relying on the unreliable U.S. President Donald Trump. In mid-May 2026, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on Europe to make greater diplomatic efforts to support Ukraine in its defensive struggle against Russia.¹² She considered it insufficient for only U.S. President Trump to maintain contact with Russia and regretted that Europe was not making full use of its diplomatic potential. The incumbent Belgian Prime Minister, Bart de Wever, has also advocated for negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.¹³

The EU should constructively support the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, led by the U.S., by putting forward its own diplomatic proposals. IPPNW also calls on Germany to advocate within NATO for a definitive end to NATO's eastward expansion, grounded in the principle of collective security that takes into account both Russia's and Ukraine's security interests. (Point 7 in the 28-point plan between the U.S. and Russia from November 2025).¹⁴

Negotiations require various formats—bilateral talks between Ukraine and Russia and at least one multilateral format. In addition, different levels of negotiation are needed: political, military, civil society, economic, cultural, and so on. All parties to the war must refrain from imposing preconditions for talks. Consultations within the EU on ending the war in Ukraine would, in terms of foreign policy, underscore the EU's commitment to multilateral diplomatic solutions. Domestically as well, such a step would be viewed positively by the public, as it would take the people's desire for peace seriously.

IPPNW advocates that a future ceasefire in Ukraine should be under a UN mandate. Arms control agreements between Russia and the U.S., as well as negotiations on gradual steps toward nuclear disarmament, should be part of the negotiation package for a sustainable resolution of the conflict. An important confidence-building measure—following the cancellation of the deployment of

¹² Former Chancellor Merkel: Europe Is Not Making Full Use of Its Diplomatic Potential, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/altkanzlerin-merkel-europa-setzt-diplomatisches-potenzial-nicht-ausreichend-ein-100.html>

¹³ Belgian Prime Minister de Wever: Europe Needs a Deal with Putin to End the War in Ukraine, <https://de.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/03/15/belgien-de-wever-deal-mit-putin-ukraine>

¹⁴ Trump and Putin's 28-Point Peace Plan for Ukraine, <https://www.merkur.de/politik/lesen-sie-im-wortlaut-trumps-und-putins-28-punkte-friedensplan-fuer-die-ukraine-zr-94049821.html>

U.S. intermediate-range weapons in Germany—could be, for example, the German government’s public renunciation of such a deployment.

6) Disarmament

Many important arms control and disarmament agreements have been terminated by the U.S. and Russia in recent years.¹⁵ Nuclear disarmament and arms control are currently on hold. Instead, Russia, the U.S., and all other nuclear-weapon states are modernizing and expanding their arsenals.¹⁶ IPPNW advocates for risk minimization and tension reduction through disarmament, arms control, and confidence-building measures. In the following, we outline the history of disarmament and arms control treaties and provide specific recommendations for action by the German government and the EU.

INF Treaty

The INF Treaty banning land-based, medium-range nuclear systems was concluded in 1987. The U.S. officially withdrew from the treaty in August 2019, after which Russia also announced its withdrawal. The reason was mutual accusations of treaty violations.

The INF Treaty was a milestone in the brief history of disarmament: in 1987, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President Ronald Reagan agreed to completely eliminate intermediate-range nuclear weapons and destroy existing arsenals. The INF Treaty is the only disarmament treaty between the two countries that resulted not only in an entire class of weapons being decommissioned from the superpowers’ arsenals, but also in the actual destruction of the missiles. As a result of the treaty, the Pershing II missiles stationed in West Germany were withdrawn.

IPPNW advocated for the negotiation of comprehensive follow-up agreements to prevent a new arms race. The deployment of new, extremely fast weapons systems (such as U.S. hypersonic weapons) with minimal warning times, on the other hand, has a highly destabilizing effect. Structural problems, such as the lack of China’s involvement, must be taken into account in new negotiations. The goals are to ease security tensions, reduce the risk of escalation, halt the

¹⁵ See: “U.S. Missiles in Germany—Deterrence or a New Arms Race?”, a lecture by retired Colonel Richter <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txYMS4T8AZQ>

¹⁶ The most important arms control and disarmament treaties in history: <https://www.atomwaffenz.info/geschichte/ruestungskontrolle>

arms race involving destabilizing weapon types, (re)build trust through verification, and stop further horizontal proliferation.

For the development of standards¹⁷, it is not absolutely necessary for all states possessing medium-range weapons to be part of a successor agreement from the outset. Nevertheless, standards are set, transparency is promoted, and long-term pressure is generated. Arms control and disarmament are particularly relevant in times of increasing global tensions and massive rearmament. During the East-West conflict, the states in the immediate vicinity of the former “Iron Curtain”—including, and especially, Germany—benefited from this. That is why their commitment to collective risk mitigation through arms control and disarmament would be particularly significant today.

New START Treaty

The last major bilateral nuclear weapons treaty limiting strategic nuclear weapons (the New START Treaty) expired on February 5, 2026. Under the treaty, which entered into force in 2011, the number of nuclear warheads on intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched long-range missiles, and nuclear bombers was reduced to 1,550. The number of delivery systems was limited to 800 per country, with no more than 700 allowed to be deployed. Russia had already formally suspended its participation in the spring of 2023, thereby also ending mutual inspections. On September 22, 2025, President Putin announced that “Russia is prepared to continue complying with the key quantitative limits of the New START Treaty for one year after February 5, 2026,” provided the U.S. does the same. U.S. President Trump left this offer unanswered.¹⁸

Representatives of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and the Pugwash Movement had already sent identical letters to the presidents of the U.S. and Russia in mid-January 2026, calling for a one-year moratorium on the extension of New START to reduce strategic nuclear weapons in order to save the last remaining arms control treaty. In the letters, the scientists cite three reasons why maintaining the treaty is in the immediate national interest of both countries. First, an extension of New START could prevent a destabilizing arms race, not only in the nuclear sphere. Without the safeguards provided by New START, the pressure to rapidly expand arsenals would be immense, which would

¹⁷ In international law, “normative development” refers to the process through which new rules, laws, and obligations for the international community of states are created.

¹⁸ Statement on the Expiration of the New START Treaty on February 5, 2026, VDW Study Group “Peace and European Security,” <https://vdw-ev.de/erklaerung-new-start-vertrag/>

entail high costs and increase the risk of miscalculations. The immediate expiration of all restrictions ultimately carries the risk of nuclear war.

Second, commitments to limit warheads and delivery systems would send a strong signal to the world. They would demonstrate that, despite geopolitical differences, the U.S. and Russia remain determined to uphold and strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Third, a one-year moratorium would give Presidents Trump and Putin the time needed to address today's challenges—including the integration of new technologies and the involvement of other nuclear-weapon states—without the sword of Damocles of a nuclear arms race hanging over the negotiating table.

To counter the danger of nuclear war, IPPNW further calls on the nuclear-weapon states to take a first step by making a legally binding commitment to refrain from the first use of nuclear weapons and to remove nuclear weapons from the highest state of alert. Already, skyrocketing military spending is coming at the expense of social and medical services—an issue that will not be discussed further here but which represents a serious problem.

7) Arms Control and Nonproliferation

Three central goals of the concept of arms control are the prevention of war through stability, cost reduction through reduced armaments, and the limitation of damage in the event of war or the prevention of nuclear escalation. In Dossier 102 of “Science and Peace” on the topic “The Return of Medium-Range Weapons,” Simon Bödecker, Juliane Hauschulz, and Marius Pletsch describe proven and new approaches to shaping arms control and disarmament in times of extreme arms race dynamics.¹⁹

The German federal government and the EU could advance realistic intermediate steps and preparatory measures on the path toward new arms control structures. Arms control agreements help increase predictability and transparency, particularly between parties that do not trust one another.

¹⁹ The Return of Intermediate-Range Weapons: Why They Threaten Global Security, Science and Peace Dossier No. 102, https://wissenschaft-und-frieden.de/dossier/rueckkehr-der-mittelstreckenwaffen/#index_9

Three specific measures could pave the way for more comprehensive discussions:

- 1) Regional dialogue forums for exchanging information and aligning perceptions of threats**
- 2) Measures for risk reduction and verification²⁰ and**
- 3) Breaking down large, complex issues into smaller components.**

A prerequisite for such discussions is a shared understanding of the negative effects of the weapons category to be controlled. In the case of land-based medium-range weapons, these include, for example, the negative effects on the strategic balance between Russia and NATO. Unlike air- and sea-based medium-range systems, the land-based variants are characterized by their extremely short warning times, as they travel at very high speeds and are virtually undetectable by early-warning systems. Furthermore, they possess high precision and destructive power. Consequently, they are particularly well-suited, in a strategic context, for surprise attacks against so-called “high-value targets” (missile launch sites, command centers, control centers, and early-warning systems) deep within Russian territory. There is also the risk of further escalation, for example, due to growing uncertainty regarding the weapon’s payload, as in the case of the Oreschnik missile. The danger posed by drastically reduced warning times and shorter reaction times, as well as the growing risk of miscalculations or misreactions, could also serve as triggers. The continuous expansion of missile defense systems in response to the development of intermediate-range weapons also carries the risk of disrupting the strategic balance. And last but not least, the buildup of intermediate-range weapons leads to the aforementioned fundamental security dilemma, which culminates in an arms race.

A necessary first step toward arms control negotiations would therefore be a dialogue on the perceived threat posed by intermediate-range weapons. This dialogue could take place in regional forums, whose structures would need to be established or reestablished. In Europe, for example, the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE would serve as possible platforms, the authors write. If direct talks between governments do not materialize, so-called “Track II” diplomacy among experts has proven effective.²¹ Building on these discussions and as a confidence-building measure, an exchange of information on existing and

²⁰ Legal and organizational measures to verify whether states are complying with agreed-upon disarmament or arms control treaties. Methods and instruments include on-site inspections, technical surveillance, and information exchange.

²¹ “Track II diplomacy” refers to unofficial, informal talks aimed at conflict resolution. These talks do not involve government representatives, but rather individuals from civil society such as scholars, former politicians, or experts. The goal is to build trust and to prepare for or support official negotiations.

planned intermediate-range systems, their armaments, and changes in deployment should begin, which can increase transparency and significantly reduce the risk of miscalculations.²²

Since the collapse of the arms control architecture in Europe jeopardizes relevant capabilities, numerous authors also recommend expanding and further developing verification capabilities and structures. Only in this way will it be possible to react quickly to political changes in the future. In light of technological advances and given that on-site inspections appear unrealistic for the foreseeable future, the expansion of innovative verification mechanisms is of central importance²³.

The authors of the 2026 Peace Report point to the growing volume of data that can be used for verification purposes: “The International Atomic Energy Agency now operates over 1,300 surveillance cameras. AI-supported analytical methods will play a central role in the future in efficiently evaluating large amounts of data. AI can also be deployed in areas such as ceasefire monitoring or peacekeeping missions—the first systems have already been used in these contexts.”²⁴

The first two steps could ultimately be followed by more comprehensive arms control talks, in which specific aspects would be addressed first. According to Oliver Meier of the “European Leadership Network,” talks on a treaty banning the nuclear armament of cruise missiles could be more successful than negotiations on a ban on all medium-range weapons. Such a partial ban, however, would already have a significant impact on stability and on reducing the risk of error and other risks. Other conceivable topics would include limiting the number or deployment locations of weapons and missile defense systems.

Dr. Max Mutschler of the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies writes in the new Greenpeace study “Well-Equipped”: “Arms control can help reduce the risk of escalation and limit the potential for destruction. Furthermore, if successful, it can also help conserve resources by rendering certain weapons

²² Grand, Camille (2023): Missiles, Deterrence, and Arms Control: Options for a New Era in Europe. IISS, Research Paper, September 25, 2023, p. 21, <https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2023/09/missiles-deterrence-and--arms-control-options--for-a-new-era-in-europe/>

²³ Graef, Alexander (2024): U.S. Intermediate-Range Weapons in Germany: Integrating Deterrence and Arms Control. IFSH Policy Brief 04/24. Hamburg, https://www.ifsh.de/file/publication/Policy_Brief/2025-01-02_NEU_KORRIGIERT_IFSH_Policy-Brief_0424_V04_web.pdf

²⁴ The Peace Report (Friedensgutachten) is a joint report by the German peace research institutes (BICC / IFSH / INEF / PRIF) and has been published since 1987. <https://www.friedensgutachten.de/media/2026/06/09/260608-FGA-2026-Gesamt-b.pdf>, p. 106

systems obsolete, provided the other side is willing to do without them as well. This point should not be underestimated, given the enormously high costs of the planned military buildup in the coming years.”²⁵

Progress in arms control policy was achieved during the Cold War even in situations marked by deep mistrust. Mutschler points out that the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) began one year after Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia, and that the U.S. and the Soviet Union successfully negotiated the control of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in the 1980s—while the Soviet Union was waging war in Afghanistan.

At its 2026 Federal Congress, the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) criticized the deployment of intermediate-range weapons, arguing that it threatens to create “a dangerous dynamic” and—unlike in the case of the 1979 NATO Double-Track Decision—“no offer whatsoever has been made to Russia for disarmament and arms control negotiations.” According to the DGB resolution, such a deployment would offer “no prospect of a follow-up agreement to the INF Treaty, which has since been terminated.”²⁶ In a representative survey conducted by YouGov and commissioned by the campaign “Capable of Peace, Not First Strike: For a Europe Without Intermediate-Range Weapons”²⁷, 54 percent of respondents supported the German government’s efforts to secure new international agreements limiting land-based intermediate-range weapons.

As a member of the campaign, IPPNW fundamentally opposes the purchase of U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles and the deployment of new intermediate-range weapons in Germany.²⁸ It calls for the termination of projects to develop Europe’s own hypersonic weapons and cruise missiles, in which Germany intends to participate. The authors of the 2026 Peace Report also present a proposal worthy of support: “Germany should seek a moratorium on the deployment of new land-based missiles within the former INF range, coupled with reciprocal transparency measures.”²⁹

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

²⁵ Greenpeace study “Gut gerüstet”
https://www.greenpeace.de/publikationen/Studie_Gut_Geruestet.pdf, p. 29

²⁶ Motion “Capable of Peace Instead of War—Our Union’s Mission in Uncertain Times”
https://www.dgb.de/fileadmin/download_center/Antr%C3%A4ge_23_OBK/Antrag_102.pdf

²⁷ Campaign “Capable of Peace Instead of First Strike: For a Europe Without Medium-Range Weapons”
<https://friedensfaehig.de/>

²⁸ Peace Movement Rejects Tomahawk Purchase, <https://friedensfaehig.de/elementor-3727/>

²⁹ Peace Report 2026, <https://www.friedensgutachten.de/media/2026/06/09/260608-FGA-2026-Gesamt-b.pdf>, p. 92

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) entered into force on March 5, 1970. It stipulates that no country other than China, France, the United Kingdom, the USSR, and the United States may legally develop or acquire nuclear weapons. There are four other states that now possess nuclear weapons but have not acceded to or have withdrawn from the NPT: Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea.³⁰

The Non-Proliferation Treaty, which many countries regard as the cornerstone of this nuclear order, is based on a fundamental promise: Non-nuclear-weapon states commit to not manufacturing or acquiring nuclear weapons—in return, nuclear-weapon states guarantee that they will disarm. Yet this agreement has become dangerously unbalanced over the past few decades. For while the non-nuclear-weapon states have kept their end of the bargain, the nuclear-weapon states are postponing nuclear disarmament indefinitely and are even expanding their arsenals. On May 22, 2026, the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) ended for the third consecutive time without a joint final document.

International IPPNW had already published recommendations for the conference in the run-up to the event.³¹ Among other things, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization called for the establishment of a permanent barrier between artificial intelligence and related technologies and the command-and-control systems for nuclear weapons. It must be ensured that humans retain full control over the use of nuclear weapons. IPPNW also called for the establishment of specific and time-bound disarmament measures for nuclear-weapon states in accordance with their obligations under Article VI. Urgent action is needed to reduce the immediate threat of nuclear war and to ensure that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains a credible and lasting instrument for preventing nuclear war. A first step could be an agreement between the governments of the United States and Russia to adhere to the limits set by the expired New START Treaty.

Other key demands include the creation of a binding legal instrument to prevent attacks on nuclear facilities that could lead to the release of ionizing radiation, particularly on nuclear power plants, spent fuel storage pools, high-level radioactive waste repositories, and reprocessing facilities. A final point is the

³⁰ Nuclear Weapons A–Z: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) <https://www.atomwaffena-z.info/glossar/begriff/nichtverbreitungsvertrag-nvv>

³¹ International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) Recommendations to the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) <https://www.ippnw.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/IPPNW-recommendations-to-the-NPT-RevCon-2026-4-23-26.docx.pdf>

reaffirmation of the commitment of all States Parties to establish and implement a zone in the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, in accordance with the 1995 NPT Review Conference

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)

The CTBT was adopted by a majority vote on September 10, 1996, by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/50/245) after a unanimous adoption could not be reached at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament. The treaty prohibits all types of nuclear weapons testing as well as all other forms of nuclear explosions. It is thus intended to put an end to the development of new types of nuclear weapons, limit the further development of nuclear weapons, and make it more difficult for new states to develop nuclear weapons.³²

However, the treaty can only enter into force once it has been ratified by 44 states listed by name in Annex 2 of the treaty. Of the states listed in Annex 2, 36 have ratified the treaty. Eight states must still accede to the treaty before it can enter into force. Ratification is still required from the following states: Egypt, China, Iran, Israel, and the United States. India, North Korea, and Pakistan have not yet signed the treaty. A total of 187 states have signed the treaty, and 178 states have ratified it.³³

More than 2,000 nuclear weapons tests since 1945 have caused lasting humanitarian and environmental damage that will burden future generations. “Russia’s withdrawal in 2023 and the U.S. government’s announcement in 2025 that it is considering resuming nuclear weapons testing after more than 30 years threaten the enduring norm against testing,” states the 2026 Peace Report („Friedensgutachten“).³⁴

IPPNW calls on the German government to urge those states that have not yet signed or ratified the treaty to do so, and to firmly reject plans for new nuclear tests—such as those proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump late last year.

³² Nuclear Weapons A-Z: Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (<https://www.atomwaffen-a-z.info/glossar/begriff/atomteststopovertrag-umfassender>)

³³ CTBTO. Ending Nuclear Test Explosions, <https://www.ctbto.org/our-mission/ending-nuclear-tests>

³⁴ Peace Report 2026, <https://www.friedensgutachten.de/media/2026/06/09/260608-FGA-2026-Gesamt-b.pdf>, p. 200

Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)

The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) established limits on conventional weapons. Russia withdrew from the treaty permanently in November 2023. In response, the NATO member states also suspended their participation. According to the Greenpeace study³⁵ “When Is Enough Enough?—A Comparison of the Military Capabilities of NATO and Russia,” following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Russia was forced to drastically reduce its weapons arsenal due to the treaty’s provisions and economic constraints, while at the same time having limited funds for modernizing its remaining major weapons systems. The situation was different for the NATO member states, which, while they too had nominally disarmed, continued to pursue comprehensive modernization and procurement.

“Cold War-era weapons programs that were essentially obsolete—the Eurofighter being perhaps the best-known example—continued to be used for the next 30 years or were expensively modified for other purposes. New threats such as terrorism or regional destabilization caused by failing states were used as justification for ongoing modernization. A multitude of military interventions and operations by NATO countries since the late 1990s (Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya) have repeatedly served as justifications for the procurement of new weapons systems,” according to the Greenpeace study. This has led to NATO countries being significantly superior to Russia in terms of the quantity of large-scale conventional weapons systems.

A new approach to reducing tensions could be the strengthening and expansion of the OSCE’s Vienna Document. It is based on the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and was agreed upon in 1990 following the end of the Cold War. Its instruments include, among other things, the annual exchange of information, the notification of exercises, verification measures (inspections, verification visits, and observation of military activities), as well as mechanisms for risk reduction in times of crisis.³⁶

The “Science and Politics” Foundation proposes regional agreements—for example, in the Baltic region.³⁷ For instance, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, agreed upon in 1995, contains provisions

³⁵ Greenpeace study “When Is Enough Enough? – A Comparison of the Military Capabilities of NATO and Russia,” https://www.greenpeace.de/publikationen/Kraeftevergleich_NATO-Russland.pdf

³⁶ German Federal Government’s Annual Disarmament Report 2023, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/111/2011110.pdf>

³⁷ Renewal of Conventional Arms Control in Europe, Wolfgang Richter, SWP Study 2019, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2019S17/>

that have proven to be effective regional instruments for confidence-building and arms control. The Agreement on Subregional Arms Control, signed on June 14, 1996, as a result of OSCE negotiations, includes limits on certain categories of heavy weapons as well as unilaterally declared, voluntary caps on troop strength, which have been observed and adhered to for years.

Other experts also propose restricting particularly destabilizing weapons, such as precision-guided weapons, cyber warfare, autonomous weapon systems, and hypersonic weapons. The authors of the 2026 Peace Report warn that continuous technological progress is taking place in the field of robotics and autonomous weapon systems—not least due to Russia’s war against Ukraine.³⁸ There is no legally binding ban on autonomous weapon systems. Negotiations on this issue have been ongoing since 2014 under the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), but disputes over definitions and vetoes by technologically leading states are blocking any progress. In 2024, the UN General Assembly did, however, adopt a resolution (A/RES/79/62) emphasizing the growing risks of lethal autonomy. The international “Stop Killer Robots” campaign advocates for a preventive, legally binding ban on fully autonomous weapons systems under international law.³⁹

Open Skies Treaty

The “Open Skies Treaty” permitted unarmed observation flights over the territories of the treaty parties. The U.S. withdrew at the end of 2020, whereupon Russia also formally withdrew in 2021. The treaty contributes to the monitoring of arms control agreements as well as to conflict prevention and management. It represents an important confidence-building measure within the OSCE region.

Germany has been a party to this important agreement since its entry into force. “Through the participation of representatives from both the observing state and the observed state in all observation flights, the treaty is also an important element of transparency and confidence-building,”⁴⁰ , writes the Federal Foreign

³⁸ Peace Report 2026, <https://www.friedensgutachten.de/media/2026/06/09/260608-FGA-2026-Gesamt-b.pdf>, p. 96

³⁹ “Stop Killer Robots” Campaign <https://www.killer-roboter-stoppen.de/forderungen/>

⁴⁰ Federal Government Report on the Status of Efforts Toward Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation, as well as on the Development of Military Capabilities for the Year 2023, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/sicherheitspolitik/abruestung-ruestungskontrolle/uebersicht-konvalles-node/openskies-node>

Office. According to security expert Wolfgang Richter, the treaty has lost its strategic purpose with the withdrawal of the U.S. and Russia.⁴¹

According to Richter, observation flights are now only possible over most NATO and EU countries, as well as over Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine, but not over Russian territory — for example, to detect troop movements along the borders of the Baltic states or toward Ukraine. Furthermore, for political and security reasons, no flights may take place over conflict zones unless the parties to the conflict expressly consent and reliably comply with security requirements. This complicates situation assessment and de-escalation should the situation worsen.

IPPNW calls on the German government to work with European partners to strongly advocate for the “Open Skies Treaty” vis-à-vis the U.S. and to support creative solutions. Wolfgang Richter offers specific proposals to this end.⁴² The treaty ensures a minimum level of military transparency and confidence-building even in times of crisis, provided that Russia and the U.S. rejoin the agreement.

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The German government must publicly acknowledge the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and their prohibition under international law, and take a corresponding stance. IPPNW also calls for Germany to accede to the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). As a first step, the German government should participate as an observer in the Review Conference of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, to be held in New York from November 30 to December 4, 2026.

In the current debate, nuclear weapons are increasingly portrayed as a necessary part of Europe’s security policy. IPPNW, however, is convinced that nuclear deterrence can never be a responsible or sustainable security strategy. Ultimately, nuclear deterrence means a willingness to use weapons of mass destruction against civilian populations. This poses a constant existential threat to humanity. In recent decades, Germany has seen itself as a defender of international law.

In this uncertain global political situation, Germany must strengthen existing international norms against nuclear weapons and thereby set an example for other European states and its partners in NATO. These include, in particular, the

⁴¹ Open Skies Treaty in Jeopardy, SWP-Aktuell, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/aktuell/2021A10_open_skies.pdf

⁴² Ibid.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the obligation under international law, contained in Article VI of that treaty, to take effective measures toward general and complete disarmament. Only those who unequivocally commit to the nuclear taboo, to nuclear non-proliferation, and to this disarmament obligation can credibly criticize the dangerous displays of nuclear power by Russia or other states.

The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has now been signed by 100 states worldwide. It prohibits all members from developing, possessing, transferring, deploying, threatening to use, or using nuclear weapons. In doing so, it establishes a strong norm under international law to counter the threat to humanity posed by nuclear weapons. Furthermore, for the first time, it provides for international programs to support the millions of people affected by nuclear testing. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is an effective and complementary instrument to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It is supported by a majority of NPT member states and—unlike the CTBT—has already entered into force.

The German government should also advocate for a pan-European nuclear-weapon-free zone that includes Russia. The new federal states, including Berlin, are already a nuclear-weapon-free zone binding under international law pursuant to the 2+4 Treaty of September 12, 1990.

8) Looming Danger: AI and Nuclear Weapons

In July 2026, Nobel laureates, scientists, and experts—including IPPNW—met at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's summer residence, and adopted a declaration on artificial intelligence and nuclear weapons. In the Rome Declaration, they warn of new nuclear risks in the age of rapidly developing AI technology and call for swift action to achieve the complete abolition of nuclear weapons. In a future nuclear crisis, the speed of artificial intelligence could leave little room for human judgment or decision-making. Furthermore, AI's potential to enable destabilizing cyberattacks or spread disinformation increases the likelihood of a nuclear war.⁴³

⁴³ Rome Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Nuclear Weapons, globalnobelassembly.org/rome-declaration

9) Conclusion

With its focus on military deterrence and rearmament, the German government is limiting its strategic room for maneuver—both in terms of negotiations, disarmament, and arms control, as well as budgetary flexibility. There is a lack of initiatives to establish channels of dialogue with Russia that could lead, in the medium to long term, to arms control, disarmament, and the establishment of a new European security architecture. IPPNW Germany therefore advocates for a change in strategy regarding Ukraine policy. It calls on the German government to launch its own diplomatic initiatives to end the war and to take specific steps to (re)activate disarmament treaties. Initial steps could include, for example, advocating for the appointment of an EU Special Envoy for Ukraine and Russia, as well as participating in the review conference of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in New York.

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