How many nuclear weapons does Europe have?

France and Britain have about 515 nuclear warheads, and some 100 American bombs are stored in five other European countries. Russia has about 4,400 in service.

All of these numbers are estimates: no nuclear power publishes its arsenal in full. The figures come from SIPRI and the Federation of American Scientists.

Europe's own warheads

France had about 290 warheads in January 2026, according to SIPRI, carried by submarine-launched missiles and by Rafale aircraft. It is the only nuclear power in the EU and keeps its deterrent fully national: it is the one NATO ally outside the alliance's Nuclear Planning Group. In March 2026 President Emmanuel Macron announced that France would increase the number of its warheads and would no longer publish figures for its arsenal.

The United Kingdom had about 225, SIPRI estimates, all on Trident missiles carried by its submarines. In 2021 the government raised its ceiling to no more than 260 warheads and stopped publishing operational numbers. In June 2025 it decided to buy 12 F-35A aircraft to join NATO's nuclear sharing mission.

Together that is about 515 warheads. Germany, Italy, Poland and every other European ally have none of their own.

American weapons in Europe

The United States keeps an estimated 100 B61 nuclear bombs at six air bases in five countries: Kleine Brogel in Belgium, Büchel in Germany, Aviano and Ghedi in Italy, Volkel in the Netherlands and Incirlik in Türkiye. SIPRI puts the number at 100 to 120 and, like the Federation of American Scientists, considers it possible that some have also been moved to RAF Lakenheath in England. Under NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement the bombs remain in American custody and control; in a conflict they would be carried by certified aircraft of the allies that take part in the mission.

NATO's doctrine is explicit about where the weight lies. Its 2022 Strategic Concept calls the strategic nuclear forces of the alliance, "particularly those of the United States", the supreme guarantee of its security.

The balance with Russia

SIPRI estimates Russia's inventory at 5,420 warheads in January 2026. About 1,020 of them are retired and awaiting dismantlement, leaving some 4,400 for use, of which about 1,800 are deployed on missiles and bombers. The United States has about 5,042, with 3,700 in its military stockpile.

Measured against Russia's military stockpile, Europe's own forces are about an eighth of the size. The open question for Europe is whether its deterrent covers the continent, and what happens if the American guarantee weakens; the conventional side of that question is in Could Europe defend itself without the US? The wider military comparison is in NATO vs Russia.

What is changing

Europe is beginning to talk about its own deterrent in the open. In February 2026 Chancellor Friedrich Merz told the Munich Security Conference that he had begun talks with Macron on European nuclear deterrence, inside NATO's nuclear sharing. On 2 March 2026 the two set up a high-ranking nuclear steering group and agreed that German conventional forces would take part in French nuclear exercises from this year. The same day Macron announced "forward deterrence": a European dimension for France's deterrent, including temporary deployments of

French nuclear-capable aircraft to allied countries. Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark agreed to take part, and Finland followed in September. The decision to use the weapons stays with the French president alone.

The Franco-German steps are designed to add to NATO's nuclear sharing, and no European nuclear force under common command is planned. Who would decide on Europe's nuclear defense, if the American guarantee weakened, is now an open political question.

All questions →

FREQUENTLY ASKED

How many nuclear weapons do France and the UK have?
About 290 French and 225 British warheads in January 2026, by SIPRI's estimate: some 515 together. France announced in March 2026 that it will increase its arsenal and stop publishing the number; Britain has not given figures since 2021 and set a ceiling of 260.

Are there American nuclear weapons in Europe?
Yes. The Federation of American Scientists estimates about 100 US B61 bombs at six air bases in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Türkiye. SIPRI gives 100 to 120 and says some may also be stored at RAF Lakenheath in Britain. No government confirms the numbers.

How many nuclear weapons does Russia have?
About 5,420 warheads in January 2026, SIPRI estimates, including some 1,020 retired ones awaiting dismantlement. Of its 4,400 usable warheads, about 1,800 are deployed on missiles and bombers. That is the largest arsenal in the world, slightly above the American one.

Does Germany have nuclear weapons?
No. Germany has none of its own. It takes part in NATO nuclear sharing, under which certified allied aircraft would carry American B61 bombs in a conflict, while the bombs stay in US custody. In 2026 Germany and France also set up a joint steering group on nuclear deterrence.

What is France's forward deterrence?
A plan President Macron announced in March 2026 to give France's deterrent a European dimension, including temporary deployments of French nuclear-capable aircraft to allied countries. Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark agreed to take part, then Finland; the decision to use the weapons stays with the French president alone.

SOURCES

- SIPRI Yearbook 2026: World nuclear forces (Kristensen and Korda, 6/2026) – Table 8A.1, January 2026: France 290 stockpile (370 including 80 retired), United Kingdom 225, United States 5,042 (3,700 stockpile), Russia 5,420 (4,400 stockpile, 1,796 deployed, 1,020 retired), world 12,187; note f: 100–120 US non-strategic bombs at 6–7 bases in 5–6 countries, possibly including the United Kingdom
- FAS Nuclear Notebook, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists: United States nuclear weapons, 2026 (Kristensen et al., 3/2026) – about 100 B61 bombs at Aviano and Ghedi (Italy), Büchel (Germany), Incirlik (Türkiye), Kleine Brogel (Belgium) and Volkel (Netherlands); possible deployment to RAF Lakenheath
- Élysée: Visit to the Île Longue operational base (3/2026) – "I have decided to increase the number of warheads of our arsenal"; "we will no longer release figures"; forward deterrence with Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Denmark; temporary deployment of strategic air forces to allied countries; decision to employ rests solely with the President
- Élysée: Joint statement on Finland's participation in French forward deterrence (9/2026)
- Élysée: Joint declaration of President Macron and Chancellor Merz (3/2026) – high-ranking nuclear steering group; German conventional participation in French nuclear exercises; adds to NATO nuclear sharing
- UK Government: Global Britain in a competitive age – the Integrated Review (3/2021) – stockpile "no more than 260 warheads"; no public figures for the operational stockpile
- UK Government: UK to purchase F-35As and join NATO nuclear mission (6/2025) – 12 F-35A for NATO's dual-capable aircraft mission
- NATO: NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements, factsheet (2/2022) – B61 weapons under US custody and control; carried by certified allied dual-capable aircraft
- NATO: Nuclear Planning Group (5/2026) – all Allies except France; NATO: Strategic Concept 2022, para. 29 – US strategic forces the supreme guarantee; NATO remains a nuclear alliance
- German Federal Government: Speech by Chancellor Merz at the Munich Security Conference (2/2026) – first talks with President Macron on European nuclear deterrence, embedded in NATO nuclear sharing