

Poland and the Extension of the British Nuclear Deterrence over Northern Europe

According to Finnish media reports, the United Kingdom has proposed extending a nuclear umbrella over the members of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). Apart from France and the United States, the UK is the only NATO member possessing its own nuclear capability. The initiative arose in response to declining faith in the nuclear umbrella provided by the United States. Poland's participation in the format would make sense if it were covered by the initiative's nuclear deterrence.

JEF as an Element of Regionalizing Collective Security Structures

The JEF (Joint Expeditionary Force) was established in 2014 following the Russian annexation of Crimea, on the initiative of the United Kingdom. In addition to the UK, it consists of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as well as Sweden and Finland, which joined JEF in 2017. JEF itself, which reached Full Operational Capability in 2018, can function both outside NATO structures and in support of Alliance operations.

The UK's decision to extend its nuclear umbrella over JEF member states creates an additional "security zone" within the North Atlantic Alliance, even though JEF itself is not part of NATO. Additionally, this leads to the sectorisation (specialisation in a given operational direction) of allies' engagement, which itself is beneficial if accompanied by the strengthening of relevant operational capabilities. The development of regional security structures itself can be explained by a decrease in trust regarding the deterrent value of both conventional and non-conventional capabilities of the United States, which is linked to the policy of the current administration. All NATO countries are already under the US nuclear umbrella anyway; binding the British umbrella to JEF countries adds another layer to deterrence—this time on a regional scale.

Facing challenges with the size of its conventional forces, the UK is attempting to maintain its power projection capabilities in the region, its role as a security provider, and its leadership within the framework it heads by offering nuclear deterrence to its closest allies. Admiral Sir Gwyn Jenkins, First Sea Lord, stated during a visit to Finland: "Finland is under a nuclear umbrella. This

is guaranteed by our submarines currently patrolling the Atlantic.” The nuclear deterrence offered by the British relies on Vanguard-class submarines and the Trident II D5 ballistic missiles they carry, equipped with MIRV warheads. Trident II missiles are serviced in the US, meaning British nuclear deterrence remains heavily dependent on Washington's policy. British nuclear doctrine is based on a minimal, credible, and effective deterrent. On one hand, it is committed to NATO's defense—as confirmed by the 1974 Ottawa Declaration (which for the first time recognized the contribution of British and French nuclear forces to the Alliance's deterrence)—while on the other, the UK ultimately reserves the right to the sovereign use of its capability. Despite a relatively small number of warheads, the UK's nuclear weapons serve to convince a potential adversary that the costs of an attack would outweigh any potential benefits. Furthermore, as part of strategic ambiguity, the UK deliberately refrains from precisely defining the threshold for the use of its nuclear weapons.

Poland's Role in the Region's Security Architecture

Poland's participation in the JEF initiative—especially in the context of seeking an enhanced nuclear umbrella—could complement the nuclear umbrella within NATO. Nevertheless, due to their size and offensive potential, the nuclear umbrellas of France and the UK are incapable of fully replacing the nuclear umbrella of the United States. They can only play a supporting role to US capability. JEF operates on the principle of a coalition of the willing—decisions to deploy troops are made by the participating member state. As a supplement to NATO mechanisms, this could increase response speed, particularly in situations involving the escalation of hybrid actions. Assigning limited forces to the initiative on Poland's part in exchange for the extension of nuclear deterrence could be beneficial from the perspective of national security.

Summary

Poland should build its own deterrence architecture by focusing on the operational directions that pose the greatest threat to its security. JEF, having both conventional and non-conventional dimensions due to its members, will have its center of gravity on NATO's northern flank. From the Polish perspective, membership in JEF would most likely involve placing a portion of its conventional forces under the command of the British headquarters

in Northwood. A Polish presence would bolster the JEF with significant "mass" positioned on the eastern flank, close to the potential threat. If Poland were to come under the initiative's nuclear deterrence, thereby gaining access to its extended nuclear deterrence, delegating limited conventional forces to JEF disposal would be a favorable solution.

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