

Is a Nuclear Small State Possible?

Mette Frederiksen's recent statements at the Munich Security Conference and her diplomatic soundings in Paris point to a perception that reliance on the US nuclear guarantee can no longer be regarded as stable or predictable. The conflict with the United States over Greenland has exposed a deep mistrust in the idea that great-power security guarantees are independent of their own territorial and economic interests. At the same time, the Prime Minister has stated in several interviews that she "does not rule out any ideas" – including integration into a French-led European nuclear umbrella.

Already in March 2025, Mette Frederiksen opened the door to the idea of nuclear armament in Europe and Denmark. When asked by Danish TV2 about nuclear weapons, she replied:

"I am focused on one thing now, and that is the defence of Europe. And I am not going to rule out any ideas about how we secure that as quickly and as effectively as possible. That also applies to the French proposal."

And most recently, on 13 February 2026, she told [Jyllandsposten](#):

"It is very, very difficult to imagine deterrence against Russia without nuclear weapons."

She continued: "I believe that Europe must do everything itself. I am not saying this in conflict with the Americans, but Europe must be able to defend itself. That is what I believe Europe must do, regardless of what happens in the United States."

With statements that she does not rule out "any ideas," she breaks with the small-state, experience-based restraint that has otherwise defined Danish defence policy for decades. But what other security-policy aspects lie behind Mette Frederiksen's statements?

And by 2 March 2026 at the latest, the leaders of Venstre, the Social Democrats and the Moderates appear on Danish [DR1](#) and announce that they are in the process of entering into a cooperation agreement with France on a nuclear partnership. At the same time, Troels Lund Poulsen mentions that Danish F-32 fighter jets can be armed with nuclear warheads.

The Collapse of the International Legal Order?

The erosion of the American nuclear umbrella as a credible guarantee of Danish security marks a fundamental break with the post-Atlantic world order (NATO), where security had previously been grounded in an asymmetrical but stable protective relationship. It appears to be such considerations that Mette Frederiksen expresses in the Munich interview.

Her statement coincides with the United States, in February 2026, attempting to force Iran to the negotiating table in Geneva, invoking the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). [See the NPT on the UN's website](#), on the UN's website. The US invocation of the NPT against Iran rests on the legal view that Tehran has violated Article III of the treaty concerning safeguards, however the real dri-

ving force is more likely a geopolitical desire to “neutralise” a regional challenger that has demonstrated resilience despite military attacks on its nuclear infrastructure in the summer of 2025.

Isn't this exactly the consequence of what Mette Frederiksen wants: to show nuclear deterrence against the US and Russia and thereby withdraw from the NPT? Is this Mette Frederiksen's 'Iran moment'?

US power projection towards Iran is camouflaged as law enforcement through the institutional framework of the international system. But the dynamics of the negotiations between the US and Iran cannot be reduced to a simple question of either legal authority or raw military force. They must instead be understood as a complex clash between the technical provisions of the NPT and the hegemonic security policy of the United States, which Mette Frederiksen has otherwise approved of so far when it came to countries other than Denmark.

When the US seeks to enforce negotiations with Iran, it formally draws on the authority of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) finding of Iranian treaty violations from June 2025. Here we see a fusion of treaty-based monitoring and realpolitik pressure, with the US acting as a kind of de facto enforcer of a global order that Iran is formally part of through the NPT, but which Tehran challenges through its enrichment practices. It is therefore not only raw military power the US exercises against Iran, but a form of power articulated as support for legal authority. The US (and the UK) thus operate in a murky and dangerous borderland between UN resolutions and unilateral geopolitical use of force.

National Sovereignty and the Nuclear Security Dilemma

Mette Frederiksen's openness to Danish acquisition of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles – Denmark already has the F-35 aircraft – therefore represents not only a radical shift from a small-state logic of neutrality or alliance, but a move towards a global doctrine of strategic nuclear autonomy.

For Denmark and Mette Frederiksen even to consider acquiring such a nuclear capability would require Denmark's de facto withdrawal from the NPT framework's Article II, which explicitly prohibits non-nuclear-weapon states from receiving or producing nuclear warheads.

Article II

Each non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to receive the transfer— from any transferor whatsoever—of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly or indirectly; not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Article III, paragraph 2

Each State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to provide: (a) source or special fissionable material, or (b) equipment or material especially designed or prepared for the processing, use or production of special fissionable material, to any non-nuclear-weapon State for peaceful purposes, unless the source or special fissionable material shall be subject to the safeguards required by this Article.

A Danish nuclear armament would be a political declaration that the international legal community has collapsed in favour of a Hobbesian state of nature, where sovereignty can only be guaranteed through ultimate deterrence against external enemies.

Mette Frederiksen's security thinking thus runs directly into the same NPT barriers as the Iranian programme. Any movement towards sovereign national control over nuclear weapons would – however unlikely it may sound today – likely trigger a diplomatic crisis and isolation of Denmark, in many ways resembling the situation seen in Iran. A Danish solo effort and acquisition of nuclear weapons would trigger the classic “security dilemma”, where the defensive intention behind the acquisition would be interpreted by neighbours and great powers as a direct threat. If Denmark were to pursue a nuclear path, it would directly challenge both US and Russian strategic interests in Europe and in the Arctic, as well as the US monopoly on defining the security architecture of the North Atlantic.

Thus, while Iran challenges US hegemony from the outside, a Danish solo nuclear effort would cause an internal breakdown of Western defence logic and likely trigger sanctions and isolation from the very allies that have so far provided protection. Denmark and Mette Frederiksen therefore face a paradox: the attempt to secure national sovereignty may paradoxically lead to the loss of the international recognition on which that sovereignty rests.

Shared Nuclear Umbrella or Danish Nuclear Weapons?

The idea of sovereign Danish control over allied-stationed nuclear weapons runs into a treaty-based barrier in the international system, where the distinction between “possession” and “control” is the very foundation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is crucial to distinguish between national acquisition and the form of “nuclear sharing” that has existed within NATO. A nuclear-weapon state such as the US, the UK, or France is legally bound under the NPT never to transfer control of its weapons to others, while a non-nuclear-weapon state such as Denmark is bound not to receive such control, directly or indirectly. A formal transfer of launch codes or final decision-making authority to Danish authorities would therefore constitute a fundamental breach of the NPT and undermine Denmark's status as a “state in good standing” in the international community.

The existing NATO “nuclear sharing” model already operates in a legal grey zone, maintained only because technical control remains with the US. If Denmark sought actual sovereign national

control, it would require a security-policy transformation that neither Washington, London, nor Paris has historically shown willingness to accept. Here Denmark would collide with the concrete realpolitik of the great powers, as seen in the destruction of Ukraine. The French doctrine of Force de Frappe is especially centred on indivisible national sovereignty; outsourcing this power to an ally would, in French eyes, weaken the very essence of French nuclear signalling and deterrence. The relationship between technical capability and political legitimacy is further complicated by the fact that Danish “sovereign national control” would force Russia to revise its escalation policy. Moscow would hardly accept a distinction between an American warhead and a Danish one, but would instead interpret any “nationalisation” of nuclear capabilities as aggressive proliferation.

One may therefore argue that while the military-technological power behind the US and Russian arsenals maintains the current balance of terror (MAD), it is the treaty-based NPT system that provides the legal structure preventing complete anarchy. Mette Frederiksen’s proposal to deviate from this order would be a fundamental signal that the NPT era is definitively over.

Whether such a security-policy paradigm shift is even practically possible without a total dissolution of NATO is the next logical question underlying Mette Frederiksen’s statement in Munich. Perhaps Mette Frederiksen, the Danish Armed Forces, and the Danish Defence Academy should look more closely at how the US acts in relation to Iran’s security interests. Does Denmark wish to stand in Iran’s place?

And in the longer term: is this the kind of world we want to live in? A world constantly balancing on the edge of nuclear destruction? Is that compatible with security, safety, and peace?