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Nuclear Issues for NATO After the Strategic Concept

What Does the 2010 Strategic Concept Say (and Not Say) About Nuclear Weapons Issues?

The Strategic Concept (SC) adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 includes a number of propositions that define NATO's future nuclear policy which, explicitly or otherwise, serve to highlight the questions that remain to be resolved. Most fundamentally, the SC, having enumerated NATO's "core tasks" as collective defense against attack, management of crises "that have the potential to affect Alliance security," and cooperation with others "to enhance international security," declares that "[d]eterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy." (Para 17)

Referring specifically to nuclear questions, the SC says:

- "The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote," but that "[a]s long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance." (Id.) The SC commits NATO to "maintain an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces." (Para 19, first bullet).
- "The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States," adding that "the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France . . . have a deterrent role of their own." (Para 18)

The Atlantic Council's Strategic Advisors Group and the Institute for National Security Studies at the National Defense University launched a project in 2010-2011 to assess the future roles, missions and tasks of the United States European Command and how it relates to NATO. The study assesses in particular how the new NATO Strategic Concept and other initiatives launched at the November 2010 NATO Lisbon summit might impact EUCOM and its future. The study brought together leading experts from the United States and Europe for three workshop discussions in Washington to inform the production of a series of issue papers offering recommendations for EUCOM. The views expressed in these papers are those of the authors themselves and do not necessarily represent the views of EUCOM, the National Defense University or the Atlantic Council.

- As part of what is necessary to "ensure that NATO has the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat," NATO is to "ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defense planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces, and in command, control, and consultation arrangements," (Para 19, fifth bullet).
- To the same end, NATO is to "develop the capacity to defend . . . against ballistic missile attack." (Para 19, sixth bullet).

Produced in cooperation with

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- The Alliance pledges "to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons . . . in a way that promotes international stability, and is based on the principle of undiminished security for all." The SC notes that NATO has "dramatically reduced the number of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and our reliance on nuclear weapons in NATO strategy" and will "seek to create the conditions for further reductions in the future." A goal in future reductions is said to be "to seek Russian agreement to increase the transparency of its nuclear weapons in Europe and relocate those weapons away from the territory of NATO members." (Para 26).
- Noting that "national decisions regarding arms control and disarmament may have an impact on the security of all Alliance members," the SC said NATO is "committed to maintain, and develop as necessary, appropriate consultations among Allies on these issues." (Id., final bullet)

Broadly speaking, the new SC thus reaffirms NATO's continued reliance on nuclear deterrence, and even repeats some past language.[1] The new SC is, however, considerably less specific on some nuclear-related issues than its 1999 predecessor. For example the 1999 document:

- Affirmed that "the fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war." (99SC para 62). To that end, they "fulfill an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies' response to military aggression . . . [and] demonstrate that aggression of any kind is not a rational option." (Id.) *The new SC includes no similar general theory of how deterrence is to operate.*
- Stated, with respect to Article 5, that "the combined forces of the Alliance must be capable of deterring any potential aggression against it, of stopping an aggressor's advance as far forward as possible . . .and of ensuring the political independence and territorial integrity of its members states. (99 SC para 41). This task was said to include ability "in case of conflict to . . . mak[e] an aggressor reconsider . . ., cease his attack and withdraw." (99 SC para 47) *The new SC includes no similarly specific set of military tasks.*
- Declared that "the existence of powerful nuclear forces outside the Alliance . . . constitutes a significant factor which the Alliance has to take into account." (99 SC para 21) *The new SC does not similarly identify possession of nuclear weapons by other states as a factor in NATO's strategic, other than – in para 9 – noting the danger of proliferation.*
- Amplified the general commitment (repeated in 2010) to "maintain an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces" by adding that they are to be "based in Europe" and be what is "necessary to ensure credible deterrence," adding that "conventional forces alone cannot ensure credible deterrence," and that "nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable," and "thus, they remain essential to preserving peace." (99 SC para 46). *The SC does not have any similar assessment of the relative roles of conventional and nuclear forces in deterrence.*
- Declared, in the context of "equitable sharing of risks and responsibilities . . . of common defense," that "the presence of United States conventional and nuclear forces in Europe remains vital to the security of Europe." (pp SC para 42) The earlier SC went on to explain that "nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance," adding that "these forces need to . . . be perceived as a credible and effective element of the Allies' strategy in preventing war." (99SC para 63) The 1999 document specifically declared that "NATO will maintain … adequate sub-strategic forces based in Europe . . . consist[ing] of dual capable aircraft and a small number of United Kingdom Trident warheads." *The new SC calls for "the broadest possible participation . . . in peacetime basing of nuclear forces" but does not assert that such basing is "vital" or "essential" either to deterrence or to alliance solidarity.*

[1] The language quoted in the first three bullets above is essentially a verbatim copy from the 1999 SC.

Some of these differences may reasonably be attributed to a determination to keep the new SC short, even at the cost of omitting significant detail, and several of the omissions may be intended as part of the general theme of reduced reliance on nuclear forces. However, to the degree that the reason for omission (or deliberate ambiguity) was the result of not wishing to force decisions on divisive questions in a time-compressed and essentially public process, the underlying issues can be expected to arise again as the Alliance moves to implement the new SC, both in subsequent formal public and confidential policy statements, and in practical decisions on doctrine, plans, and force postures.

The Public Political Context for Alliance Debate on Nuclear Issues

Resolving within the Alliance these nuclear questions that the SC leaves open will be difficult, because even on strictly military issues, views within the Alliance span the entire spectrum of possible opinions. At one end, vocal elements within the societies, if not the security establishments, of many allies maintain that nuclear weapons have *no* legitimate military role because the consequences would be so catastrophic that any actual use is beyond contemplation. For many more, and in this case including many in positions of some direct say over security decisions, nuclear weapons' only legitimate function (at least since the disappearance of the Soviet threat) is strictly limited to response to actual nuclear attack on an allied country.[2] Still others, however, observe that large-scale conventional war – at least in crowded Europe – could be equivalent in casualties and destruction to nuclear attacks, and so believe the Alliance should reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to impending conventional defeat, and to make plans and preparations for such response. (This was, of course, the official doctrine of the Alliance not only during the latter stages of the Cold War, but as explicitly reaffirmed in 1999.) Finally, there are those who would advocate NATO turning back to a still earlier doctrine, whereby the Alliance would adopt as its doctrinal position that it would not commit to defer nuclear response until conventional defense had failed, but might instead employ nuclear weapons at a very early stage. While the center of gravity of opinion within NATO has, since the Cold War ended, no doubt shifted substantially toward the more limited roles for nuclear weapons, each of these positions (and variants of them) still has adherents in circles with potential influence within the various allies.

But views on nuclear issues diverge not simply because of differences over their military role. All military forces have a political significance, but it remains true – despite the new SC's rather curious omission of an explicit acknowledgement – that nuclear weapons are, to an extraordinary degree, political rather than traditional military instruments. This powerful political element makes the differences within the Alliance all the greater. And while the divergent views on the politics of nuclear weapons to some degree mirror differences over their military missions, they are at least as much about intra-NATO political relations as impact in potential adversaries. For some Europeans (and perhaps even for some Americans) the main significance of nuclear weapons for NATO is that the possibility of their use is the most powerful symbol of American commitment to the security of its allies, because it entails the United States not only committing its most potent military forces to Europeans' security, but, much more important, accepting a very high risk of nuclear attack on the U.S. homeland in the service of that cause. And NATO reliance on nuclear weapons is seen as a signal of solidarity among the European allies as well. There are, however, within the Alliance, quite different – and less enthusiastic – political perspectives. There are some who regard retention of any NATO reliance on nuclear weapons as not simply a militarily unnecessary anachronism, but as a positive burden – at best an unnecessary diversion from more relevant security efforts and a source of division within their societies, and at worst, a serious obstacle to ambitious disarmament goals, to a constructive relationship with Russia, and to building a peace order based on friendship and cooperation with both historic old and potential new rivals within and outside Europe.

What Nuclear Issues are Likely to Arise?

The issues with important doctrinal, operational, and financial implications left open by the SC, and on which these differences in perspective may be expected to produce division within the Alliance, include:

- Granted that NATO's nuclear forces are for deterrence, what are they to deter, and in what

[2] Others would expand that role slightly, regarding it as at least theoretically appropriate to respond with nuclear weapons to attacks using chemical or biological (and, conceivably, other 'non-conventional' weapons) that had effects equivalent to nuclear attacks.

circumstance would they actually be used? Specifically, would NATO ever use nuclear weapons in response to strictly conventional attack?

- What sort of nuclear forces are needed to meet NATO's requirements? Specifically, need NATO continue to maintain nuclear forces based on European soil?
- What steps might NATO consider taking to "create the conditions for further reductions" or even for a "world without nuclear weapons?"

The balance of this paper addresses these three questions in turn, attempting to outline the issue and possible courses of action.

Basic Doctrine: What is to Be Deterred by the Prospect of Nuclear Response and How Should Nuclear Weapons Be Used if Deterrence fails?

During the Cold War, there was no question that the task of deterrence was to dissuade the Soviet leadership from a massive conventional as well as nuclear attack. [Lacking confidence in the effectiveness of direct conventional defense against supposed Soviet superiority, the Alliance judged that holding open the option of early use of nuclear weapons against such an attack made a powerful contribution to deterrence – not simply because it would vastly complicate the Soviet attack, but because it would make clear that even conventional success would come at an immense – and for any rational leadership, an intolerable – price.] Moreover, the Soviet Union was not just the primary object of deterrence; it was for all practical purposes the only one. Today, NATO has expanded its area of concern from direct territorial attack to meeting challenges farther afield. On the other hand, NATO's relative conventional capability is vastly greater than during the Cold War.

Deterring Whom?

Under current conditions, however, it is far less obvious what states are to be considered the objects of deterrence. The potential candidates are, on the one hand, Russia, and on the other, states – such as Iran and potentially others – with expansive regional ambitions.[3] There are arguments for regarding both, either, or, indeed, neither, of these candidates as the objects of NATO's nuclear concerns, but decisions will need to be made – and to some degree at least reflected in formal doctrine, not just secret contingency plans.

The Russian case is not so easily dismissed as (accurate) observations about improved relationships and major shifts in conventional military capability might imply. Russia, however much its conventional forces have weakened since the implosion of the Soviet Union, still undoubtedly has (and indeed demonstrated in Georgia in 2008) the capability and, in the right circumstances, the will to overwhelm the strictly national defenses of small neighbors. Assuming continuing economic recovery and further rise of nationalist and even revanchist ambitions, both Russia's capacity and its inclination to use force on the periphery of NATO may increase.

The "Irans" of the foreseeable future seem unlikely to have significant capacity to use conventional forces to invade allied territory,[4] but they could well take actions outside the strict confines of NATO territory that threaten critical NATO interests and that would justify NATO military response. And, as the SC implies, they may, in the future, have nuclear weapons and the ability to strike NATO territory and forces with them. If such "Irans" were able to deliver nuclear attacks on NATO territory, they might try to use the threat of such attacks to coerce NATO into declining to intervene.

Should NATO maintain an option for nuclear strikes in response to conventional aggression?

That potential military threats exist does not in itself say much about how NATO nuclear threats or even the actual use of nuclear weapons should or even could be employed to deter or, if necessary, defeat them. A critical question is whether NATO should contemplate nuclear strikes in response to conventional provocations – or to deter and assert its readiness to do so. Of course, even during the Cold War, there was debate over this question. In the early days of the confrontation with the USSR, and out of belief that NATO could not (or, as a matter of will and resources, would not) match Soviet conventional potential, there was considerable

[3] It is certainly plausible that the most likely threats to NATO interests come, not from states, but from terrorists and other non-state actors, but it is hard to see how nuclear weapons can be employed against, or the threat of their use serve to deter, such adversaries.

[4] Turkey, because of its proximity to Iran, and indeed to other possible "rogue" nuclear weapons states, potentially presents an important exception.

support for the idea that nuclear weapons could, and indeed must, be used for the direct defeat of invading Soviet conventional forces that would otherwise be able to overwhelm NATO conventional defenses. The idea that nuclear weapons could accomplish an otherwise impossible conventional defense was short-lived even in the Cold War. Quite apart from questions about just how nuclear weapons were to be decisive in their direct effects, once the Soviet Union had substantial nuclear forces of its own, it became increasingly implausible to expect that allied nuclear attacks would produce a decisive advantage on the ground. Whatever allied nuclear strikes could achieve against the Soviet invader, Soviet counter-blows could achieve against the defense. And, even more importantly, the scale of destruction (most of it, by hypothesis, on allied, or at least non-Soviet, territory) would have increased drastically (at the cost primarily of the allies) from this two-sided nuclear exchange.

But the recognition that nuclear weapons offered no realistic prospect of easy battlefield victory by no means eliminated the basis for hope that they could have a critical deterrent effect in respect to conventional threats. Even if use of nuclear weapons did not offer much hope of changing the immediate outcome of the battle, it would inevitably produce an escalation of destruction, and this prospect could plausibly be seen as contributing mightily to conventional deterrence, the theory being that such escalation would convince the Soviet leadership – hopefully before starting the war, but perhaps even after initial successes – that the costs would exceed any possible gains in the attack itself. If nuclear weapons would not be likely to stop an invasion directly, they could still make "victory" too costly to be worth the attempt to achieve it.[5]

The need for NATO to rely even on this aspect of nuclear deterrence in contemporary conditions may appear to be a thing of the past. In particular, the premise of the "battlefield" theory of nuclear strategy was that the Soviet Union had an overwhelming conventional supremacy and there is no reason today to believe that any conceivable combination of adversaries – and certainly not Russia alone – would enjoy today the general conventional superiority that was attributed to the Soviet Union. Whatever NATO's nuclear forces are needed for today, it is not to achieve ultimate victory on the conventional battlefield. Accordingly, it can reasonably be argued that if successful conventional defense against any plausible attack is possible – and it is hard to see why it is not – there is little need to rely on the risk of massive pre-emptive escalation to meet conventional aggression.[6]

There is, however, an important qualification to this argument that the conventional balance has so shifted that nuclear deterrence is irrelevant to the conventional defense problem.[7] An ultimately successful conventional defense is likely to entail huge costs, especially to the immediate target of the aggression, and the likely immediate victims might therefore prefer to costly "liberation" that an attack be met (and ideally deterred) by immediate nuclear response from their allies. Arguably, such a threat of NATO "first use," even when conventional defense would eventually prevail, could remain a legitimate, if controversial, element of NATO doctrine. The argument for not foregoing this option is, of course, less any pretense that early nuclear responses would in fact be the more or less automatic consequence of attack, but there is no reason to assure potential aggressors that this would *not* happen. On the other hand, keeping open the option of "first use," where conventional defense is likely to be effective, is inconsistent with regarding nuclear weapons as instruments of last resort and potentially reduces the pressure for restraint by a nuclear-armed aggressor. (The Soviet Union appears to have responded to the prospect of an early NATO resort to nuclear strikes by adopting a doctrine that contemplated early Soviet use of nuclear weapons.) Moreover, increasing the risks that collective defense of vulnerable allies would mean nuclear war may weaken alliance cohesion, thus diminishing rather than enhancing deterrence.

Accordingly, although ending reliance on nuclear weapons for conventional deterrence would be both an obvious further doctrinal response to the changed strategic and military environment and a step toward the stated goal of further reducing nuclear reliance generally, adjuring the threat of nuclear response to conventional attack may not prove as easy a measure as some would claim.

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[5] This element of deterrent of conventional attack by the prospect of unacceptable losses from nuclear response was re-asserted in the 1999 SC.

[6] The U.S. 2010 Nuclear Posture Review declared it to be U.S. policy not to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear adversary, a position that does not bar "first use" against aggression by a nuclear weapons state.

[7] Of course, confidence in ultimate conventional success presumes that the members of the Alliance continue to devote the resources to maintain it – including in the face of possible substantial increases in the conventional capabilities of potential adversaries.

Nuclear Deterrence or Nuclear Coercion?

Always implicit in the utility of nuclear weapons for deterrence was yet another element: any alliance depends for its credibility – and ultimately for its effectiveness – on the willingness of those allies that are not immediately threatened to come to the aid of those that are. So strong is attachment to the NATO creed that an attack on one ally is to be treated as an attack on all, that it is easy to overlook how difficult might be the decision to fulfill that obligation. In particular, once the Soviet Union had a capacity to inflict immense destruction on the American continent, regardless even of any U.S. attempt at pre-emptive damage limitation, the credibility of the American commitment to NATO came to depend crucially on that threat not inducing the United States to draw back. (Nor, in fact, was the problem limited to the United States; there was always an element – which the Soviets routinely exploited – of the Soviets using nuclear threats aimed at more distant European allies to discourage them from aiding the allies immediately at risk.) American nuclear weapons played a critical role in offsetting this "divide and conquer" potential, for it meant that any Soviet nuclear attack on the United States would bring an unimaginably powerful counter attack.

Arguably, at least, it is this potential for nuclear weapons to offset nuclear blackmail that is most relevant in today's conditions. If one judges that the most likely serious threats to NATO interests come not from direct violation of NATO territory, but from actions outside the allies' formal territorial jurisdictions that "have the potential to affect Alliance security," it is important that NATO have not only the military capability but the collective political will to use conventional (and expeditionary) military force to counter such actions. After the Afghanistan experience, assuring that political will may be a formidable task.[8] And if the regional aggressor has even a limited nuclear capability, the task would be all the harder, for the regional aggressor is likely to seek to use nuclear threats to discourage such NATO intervention against its regional ambitions.

Negating such potential nuclear blackmail is, of course, a primary reason for U.S. and NATO commitment – now affirmed in the new SC and by separate action at the Lisbon Summit – to build an effective defense against missiles that could be used to carry nuclear weapons to targets in NATO territory. But the blackmail threat will be most effectively negated if effective defenses are backstopped by traditional deterrence and the prospect of powerful retaliation. Providing that backup may become a central rationale for NATO nuclear forces in the future.

Operational Doctrine for Revised Nuclear Tasks?

Assuming NATO can agree on the specific role or roles for nuclear weapons in NATO deterrence, whether only for direct nuclear attacks, or also for nuclear coercion and possibly even in some cases for conventional attacks, that general deterrent doctrine will require resolution of important operational questions that themselves have policy and political significance.

While, by definition, deterrence is a matter of threats, not actions, (i.e. of inducing the adversary to refrain from action by the mere prospect of the consequences of such action), it is, for a variety of reasons, essential if the threat is to be credible, that there be actual operational capability and preparations to carry out the threat. That requires identifying forces that are technically capable of carrying out nuclear operations, but that also have the operational capacity to do so; their crews must have the necessary training, and they must have access to the specific plans for the missions (or the capability to generate them in the event). Moreover, there must be a system for command and control of the necessary forces – not only to make the plans (whether in advance or in real time) but to make the decisions on actual operations and to convey those decisions to the forces themselves.

Meeting these requirements is difficult enough for a single nation with nuclear forces especially if that nation is one that adheres to the principle of democratic and civilian control of crucial military operations. It is all the more difficult in NATO as an alliance of democracies in which responses to aggression are decided by consensus among independent nations. And assuring that the necessary institutional arrangements are in place for NATO will pose even greater challenges than during the Cold War, if only because the

[8] A striking non-nuclear feature of the new SC is the absence of any statement that crisis management might involve actual military operations, while the 1999 document repeatedly referred to "non-Article 4 crisis response operations." (99 SC, inter alia, paras 10, 29, 31, 41, 43, 47, 49., 52, 53b, 54).

context for which contingencies must be planned for and decisions made would likely be less clear-cut.[9]

In particular, there will be hard questions about what targets are appropriate and effective for a doctrine of deterrence of more limited threats. Where the objective is anything less than simply causing maximum possible destruction in the face of an immediately mortal threat, target selection is a serious challenge to nuclear planning. And even leaving aside the very serious issues of international law and fundamental morality that are involved, it is by no means clear that the sort of deterrence NATO should expect from nuclear weapons would be well served by a targeting policy whose objective is killing large numbers of civilians. However, implementing a targeting policy that is more focused (and probably more effective for deterrence of the likely adversaries) presents formidable problems. NATO planners (and policymakers) will need to establish an understanding of what the adversary leadership values and whose loss (or prospective loss) would most likely induce restraint. That understanding will have to be converted into operationally meaningful categories of targets. Specific targets in those categories will have to be identified by intelligence and the resulting target lists will have to be embodied in executable strike plans.

In all probability, there will be a requirement for policy-level review of the general concepts underlying the operational plans, if not of their specific details. Moreover, there is likely to be a need to develop not only a range of pre-planned options, but a system for real-time additions and modification to the options. Moreover, the process will entail a complex balancing of secrecy, as to details against transparency, both for democratic and alliance legitimacy and for deterrence, since the whole purpose is to affect the decisions of adversaries. In addition, and arguably most difficult of all, there will be a need for agreement on how decisions would be made in the midst of a crisis, that would, by definition, be of historically unprecedented gravity.

Force Structure Requirements: What Nuclear Forces Does NATO Need? And Do They Include Capabilities Based in Europe?

The most striking and specific difference between the 1999 and the 2010 SC on nuclear issues is the in the treatment of the issue of nuclear forces based in Europe.

Too often, the issue of the force structure needed to support NATO's nuclear policies, and indeed the issue of NATO nuclear policy itself, is treated as if the only problematic question is the continuing role of those nuclear-capable forces that currently are both specifically allocated to NATO missions and physically based in Europe, i.e. the relatively few dual capable aircraft, both U.S. and allied, that today are permanently stationed at a handful of airbases in Europe and tasked with the mission of delivering the hundreds of American-owned gravity nuclear bombs that are also stored at those bases. The SC wisely avoids that error, putting NATO's nuclear doctrine and posture in the broader context. In doing so, the new SC – probably prudently – sidestepped the subsidiary, but not unimportant, question of the future of those stationed forces.

Both documents declare, in virtually identical words,[10] that "the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies." (SC para 18; 99SC para 62). All three of NATO's members who have nuclear forces of their own have committed to maintain them, and it seems unlikely those commitments will change. The re-affirmation that it is the Alliance's *strategic* nuclear forces that provide the "supreme guarantee" usefully establishes the fundamental principle that the credibility and efficacy of extended deterrence for NATO is not to be measured by, nor is it dependent on, *tactical* nuclear forces permanently stationed in Europe.

This continuity in regard to strategic forces is in sharp contrast to the omission in 2010 of the earlier document's

9 No doubt some of these more technical, operational, and institutional issues have already been addressed inside the United States and NATO nuclear planning systems, but they will require continual updating – and validation and approval at a political level.

10 The only difference between the two formulations is that the 2010 document inserts the word "strategic" in describing the British and French nuclear forces, perhaps reflecting that by 2010, both forces consisted entirely of submarine launched ballistic missiles, the last bomber-based weapons having been retired.

specific pledge to maintain Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) in Europe and its encomiums to the role of Europe-based nuclear forces, then described as "essential" and "vital" to alliance solidarity and effective deterrence. But the new document still declares that NATO will "ensure the broadest possible participation" not only in planning and consultations on nuclear issues, but "in peacetime basing of nuclear forces" (SC para 19, fifth bullet).[11] The Obama Administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) was equally careful to avoid either re-affirming the need to maintain European deployments or declaring them unnecessary. Having noted that the current stationing arrangements "contribute to Alliance cohesion and provide reassurance to allies and partners who feel exposed to regional threats" the NPR pledges only to "retain the capability to forward deploy U.S. nuclear weapons on tactical fighter-bombers and heavy bombers," and makes no similar commitment regarding stationing. It does, however, affirm that "any changes in NATO's nuclear posture should only be taken after a thorough review within – and decision by – the Alliance" and promises that "no changes in U.S. extended deterrence capabilities will be made without close consultation with our allies and partners." (NPR xii-xiv, and 31).

The markedly more guarded treatment of stationed forces is, of course, a reflection of renewed debate on both sides of the Atlantic on the issue. Parts of the U.S. military have long questioned the utility, not to mention the necessity, of continuing the current arrangements. During the run-up to the drafting of the new SC, several European allies (or at least prominent officials within their governments) raised the possibility of using the occasion to announce total or partial termination of the current arrangements. Other allies responded by declaring their continued support for those arrangements, as, among other things, a symbol of Alliance solidarity and American commitment to extended deterrence. In the end, the SC, as finally approved, avoided any immediate change while at least implicitly leaving the question open for review in the near future.

Change will not be easy, or even necessarily wise. There are significant forces within the Alliance that argue for continuing European-basing as an element of NATO nuclear posture, primarily for its contribution to the symbolism of deterrence and solidarity (and to some extent as a potential bargaining chip in negotiations on Russian tactical nuclear forces). There are inevitably inertial forces that tend to foster deferring any change in arrangements that, whatever their military utility or cost-effectiveness, are long-standing. There is even an argument that the whole question of the DCA and their weapons is simply not important enough to be worth a prolonged and potentially divisive debate.

Nonetheless, it seems likely that this issue will continue to be raised. There are real questions about the military value of the present arrangements and about whether, if NATO ever did decide to use nuclear weapons, it would find it advisable, or perhaps even feasible, to do so using gravity bombs on tactical aircraft when there are other delivery means available with vastly higher confidence in reaching their targets, and at least as great accuracy and flexibility in choice of targets and weapon yields. Reportedly, some at least of the European-based aircraft, currently counted as committed to a nuclear role, lack fully trained and certified crews and equipment, and so would require some time to actually be available for missions. There are continuing questions as to the security of the stored weapons, at least at some bases. For some host countries, there is significant domestic opposition to continued stationing. There is a view that continued preparation for use of "tactical" nuclear forces is inconsistent with non-proliferation principles and aspirations for reduced reliance on nuclear weapons.

Perhaps the most important factor forcing re-evaluation of the current arrangements is that the aircraft now assigned to the dual conventional and nuclear role are approaching retirement, and before many more years pass, decisions will need to be made on whether to make the funds available that would be needed for there to be new nuclear-capable aircraft to replace them.

Since the issue is likely to be raised, it is worth considering what are realistic and effective options that should be considered in deciding whether, and if so, how to change the current arrangements. The options – and issues they present – include:

[11] The 2010 commitment on participation in basing is phrased in slightly different, and arguably somewhat stronger, terms than those used in 1999. Participation is to be "the broadest possible," not just "widespread" and it is described as part of ensuring "that NATO has the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat," rather than, in the 1999 version, an element of what is required for the narrower task of "a credible Alliance nuclear posture and the demonstration of Alliance solidarity and common commitment to war prevention." Whether these verbal variations have policy significance is presumably known to those who drafted and approved the new SC.

- Shifting explicitly to reliance entirely on strategic forces. The SC describes strategic forces as NATO's "supreme guarantee," and it may well be that as a practical matter, if NATO ever came to the point of considering nuclear strikes seriously, the mission of delivering the blow would be assigned to some element of long-range (i.e., "strategic") forces – bombers, submarines, or intercontinental ballistic missiles. Certainly the forces permitted the United States when the New START Treaty comes fully into effect will be sufficiently numerous for that to be done without compromise to other deterrence tasks. Arguably, NATO would do well simply to declare this to be the case and proceed on that basis, both in public declarations and operational planning. The acceptability of this option could be enhanced by backing up a public declaration of this policy with more formal and transparent arrangements (modeled on the system whereby some U.S. and UK submarine-based weapons were allocated to SACEUR) for allocation of strategic weapons to NATO, and for expanded NATO roles in planning for them. Such arrangements would, of course, have to deal with the reality that the weapons would remain ultimately under the control of the three allies that actually run the subs, but it is equally true that the DCA, like virtually all of NATO's potential military assets, are national systems.
- Terminating the part of the current arrangements that assign the mission of delivering U.S.-owned nuclear weapons to allies, leaving the mission entirely to U.S.-operated aircraft. This course of action might somewhat reduce the grounds for host-country opposition, to the degree that opposition is based on disapproval of a direct host country role. This option would also moot the question of replacing the allied aircraft now assigned the nuclear mission, with the United States having already pledged to commit the resources necessary to maintain this capability (including ensuring that there will be nuclear-qualified F-35s to replace the current U.S. DCA). However, it is not clear that there would be significantly less opposition to the continued presence of American nuclear weapons and delivery aircraft in those countries just because the operational role of allied air forces had been eliminated, and the elimination of the distinctively European role might weaken the burden-sharing and solidarity significance of maintaining DCA in Europe. And the United States might well object to an arrangement that sharply reduced the European, but not the U.S., role and where it, and not the allies, had to bear the costs of maintaining a capability that is at best marginal in terms of overall U.S. nuclear capability.
- Further reducing the number of bases at which DCA (whether U.S. or European) are located, using the consolidation to enhance security and perhaps eliminate basing in countries where it is most controversial. The number of DCA bases has already been substantially reduced, and a further reduction could reasonably be portrayed as a logical next step in reducing, but not eliminating, NATO's reliance on nuclear options. In one case (Greece) a reduction had the effect of closing the last nuclear weapon base in the country in question. This option would allow eliminating the bases that are most problematic (whether on grounds of domestic politics, security, or readiness) while maintaining nuclear basing where (as is apparently the case for Turkey) it is regarded as valuable for alliance and bilateral relationships.
- Shifting basing from some or all current locations – mostly in countries whose publics are less than enthusiastic hosts – to other allies who do not now host bases but might welcome the sign of an enhanced military role (and the stronger link to the United States). However, the new hosts would almost certainly have to be drawn from among the new NATO members, and – even if the bases were welcomed by them (which the experience with missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic shows is not necessarily the case) – the forward movement of U.S. nuclear weapons would meet with vigorous opposition from Russia, and probably from some allies as well.

Considering options for changing the current arrangements should not, however, be limited to the arrangements themselves. A reduction in, or elimination of, permanent basing of DCA in Europe could be accompanied by:

- Plans and commitments to deploy aircraft and nuclear weapons from the United States in the event of need. This approach – which has been adopted by the United States in respect to its Asian allies – would allow maintaining the option of a distinctively

"European" or "theater" nuclear operation, without the ongoing costs – in both resource and political terms – of permanent basing. It would, however, also entail ending any allied operational role and it would also mean that nuclear weapons would have to be moved into place in times of increased tensions – or even at the start of hostilities. Whether such deployment would be more likely to heighten tensions or to enhance deterrence is, of course, debatable – and probably heavily dependent on the circumstances.

- Greater public information about the arrangements. The nominal secrecy of the details of current arrangements does little to serve operational security; surely any potential adversary would be well informed about the location, numbers, capabilities and vulnerabilities of the aircraft. Indeed, it seems likely NATO's reticence about the arrangements was, historically, motivated at least as much by a judgment that public discussion would be divisive in the Alliance as by normal military security concerns. It is at least arguable that, in current conditions, the nominal secrecy does more to encourage speculation and controversy than a more open information policy.

- Enhanced allied involvement in nuclear planning generally. Broad participation, not just in peacetime basing, but also in nuclear "planning, command, control, and consultation arrangements" is identified in the SC as among the necessary capabilities of the Alliance. Whatever the continuing role of DCA in NATO nuclear strategy, changes in institutions and organization geared to ensuring a high level of allied understanding, and participation in decision-making and planning on NATO's nuclear doctrine and force posture might well serve to build consensus on these issues.

How Might NATO's Nuclear Strategy be Impacted By the SC's Declarations Regarding Arms Control and Creating the Conditions for Further Reductions in Reliance on Nuclear Weapons?

The SC affirms an ambitious arms control policy for the Alliance, including seeking to create "the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons" and "for further reductions in the future" in numbers of a reliance on nuclear weapons. It also sets a specific negotiating goal of addressing non-strategic nuclear weapons, including Russian agreement on transparency concerning such weapons, their relocation away from NATO territory, and "taking account" of the disparity between Russian and allied stockpiles of such weapons. It also calls for "appropriate consultations" among allies on "national decisions regarding arms control and disarmament." Each of these elements is likely to call for alliance decisions in the future.

The ratification of the New START treaty, in principle, opens the road for further negotiations. At a minimum, the allies will expect that American consultation will be at least as candid, timely, and complete in the future as it has been in recent years, particularly if the United States is to begin serious consideration of a new proposal related to non-strategic systems. Conversely, allies, including the United States, can reasonably expect that European allies will not make decisions on nuclear-related issues – whether their own forces, participation in basing, investments in DCA, proliferation-sensitive actions, or policy declarations – without consultation. The difficulty, of course, is that these questions are complex and usually matters of substantial debate even within national governments, so that "consultation" easily comes to mean little more than an often modest degree of advance notice.

The declared interest in negotiating restrictions on Russian tactical nuclear weapons is likely to interact with NATO decisions on DCA. Some will argue that ending current arrangements is a prime candidate for further reduction in numbers and reliance; others will maintain that if tactical nuclear weapons are to be the subject of negotiation, NATO should preserve the current arrangements as a potential inducement. The issue of what the United States and NATO might be prepared to put on the table in connection with expanding the scope of nuclear arms control will not, however, be limited to DCA. The disparity that exists between Russian and allied stockpiles of shorter-range nuclear systems – not to mention Russia's linkage between missile defense (and, less prominently, non-deployed weapons that could, in principle, be uploaded onto existing delivery platforms) and any future agreement on offensive weapons – will inevitably lead to suggestions for broadening the scope of discussions. This broadening would include topics such as defenses, third country forces, stockpiles, and forward deployments, which are all sensitive issues in various allied countries.

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