

BULLETIN

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Assessment of NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review

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NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, approved at the Chicago Summit, underscores the Alliance's cohesion and credibility in its deterrence capabilities. However, NATO member states postponed decisions on many controversial questions, which weakened the review's overall message. The review contains several provisions advocated by Poland, and to ensure they are adhered to in practice, the country should actively engage in efforts to implement them.

At the Chicago Summit, NATO members announced the results of the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR). The review, mandated at the summit in Lisbon, was expected to draw closer the divergent positions of NATO members on nuclear policy and posture. The need for DDPR resulted from the ambiguous provisions of the 2010 Strategic Concept on the role that nuclear weapons play for the Alliance and the continued need for basing about 180 B-61 nuclear gravity bombs in five European countries and maintaining aircraft specifically adapted for their delivery (dual capable aircraft, or DCA). The DDPR process was also expected to define a role for conventional forces and territorial missile defence (MD) in NATO's overall mix of capabilities. The broad scope of the review was meant in part to alleviate concerns by Poland and other Central and Eastern European (CEE) NATO members that a discussion focused solely on nuclear issues could distract attention from equally important non-nuclear capabilities.¹

DDPR's Main Message. The review underscores the Alliance's cohesion and the credibility of the deterrence capabilities that NATO possesses or plans to develop to address threats in an unpredictable security environment. The DDPR's provisions are an attempt to reconcile the divergent interests of NATO member states. On the one hand, taking into account the expectations of CEE states, the DDPR stipulates that although the risk of a conventional threat to the Alliance is low, it should not be ignored. On the other hand, the DDPR meets the expectations of some, including Germany and the Benelux states, which strived for underscoring the role of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation in the realisation of NATO's objectives.

Nuclear Forces. DDPR sanctions the *status quo* related to NATO's nuclear deterrence capabilities. NATO members reconfirmed that nuclear weapons remain a core component of NATO's overall capabilities. Indirectly referring to arguments that nonstrategic (tactical) nuclear weapons are of limited value to the Alliance, they emphasised that all components of NATO deterrence are effective. A new element introduced by DDPR is acknowledgement of the importance of negative security assurances, which limit circumstances in which nuclear weapons states might contemplate their use. This provision of the DDPR constitutes a compromise between states, including the U.S., Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway, that advocated for the inclusion of a declaration in the DDPR that clearly reduces the role of nuclear weapons for NATO, and France, which opposed it.

The substance of the DDPR indicates the review did not bridge the division of the Alliance's two camps—one that questions the need to base U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe (i.a., Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, and Norway) and the other that has adopted a conservative approach to changes (i.a., CEE states, France, Italy, and Turkey). DDPR does not supplement in any way the provisions of the Strategic Concept related to the role of nonstrategic weapons based in Europe.

¹ J. Durkalec, "NATO Defence and Deterrence Posture: Central and Eastern European Perspectives", *PISM Policy Paper*, No. 29.

It only reiterates provisions of the Concept, reflecting a consensus that NATO members are ready to reduce them in the context of reciprocal steps by Russia.

DDPR seems to strengthen the consensus of all NATO members that the achievement of Russian reciprocity is a prerequisite for changes in NATO's nuclear force posture. It is therefore consistent with the position of Poland and its initiatives. NATO members announced their readiness to increase transparency, confidence and trust related to NATO and Russian tactical nuclear arsenals. DDPR gave NATO two follow-up tasks that could serve as preparation for reciprocal reductions: first, it calls for the development of additional concepts for how to ensure the broadest possible participation in nuclear-sharing arrangements, and second, it seeks further consideration for possible Russian steps that could allow significant reductions of U.S. nuclear weapons based in Europe.

Additionally, the review stated that "while seeking to create conditions and considering options for further reductions" of nonstrategic nuclear weapons, NATO members will ensure that all components of NATO's nuclear deterrent remain effective. That may be interpreted as a commitment to maintain the current arsenal until achieving an agreement with Russia. It is necessary, however, to underscore that DDPR leaves NATO members the flexibility to pursue unilateral steps. Also, DDPR does not fully address the perspectives for maintaining the *status quo* in case Russia is unwilling to take reciprocal steps, or the readiness of Germany, the Netherlands, or Belgium to adapt newer aircraft to nuclear delivery roles in order to replace their current older DCA's.

Conventional Forces. DDPR underscored the indispensable role of conventional capabilities in strengthening deterrence and defending NATO members. Such forces should be able to conduct a wide range of tasks, from collective defence to crises management. The review reflects the readiness of NATO members to sustain conventional weapons at an adequate level, even with the ongoing financial crisis. As a means of achieving the required force levels in the future, DDPR refers to the "Smart Defence" and "Connected Forces" initiatives.²

To a large extent, the review met the expectations of CEE states. DDPR underscores the role of *visible assurance* and a strengthening of the NATO Response Force. It is also a success for CEE states that all NATO members recognized the need for reviewing the consequences of the acquisition of modern military technologies by states outside the Alliance. That may open the way for consultation on transfers of such technologies to third states. In recent years, CEE states have raised concerns about such issues, for example, the purchase of French Mistral class ships by Russia.

DDPR neither confirms nor denies any link between the strengthening of NATO's conventional deterrence and reducing the reliance on nonstrategic nuclear weapons based in Europe. That seems to reflect a lack of consensus within NATO on this issue.

Missile Defence. In the DDPR, NATO for the first time defined in detail the role that MD can play in the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture. Despite the announcement in Chicago of MD Interim Capability, DDPR provisions indicate that granting a more central role to MD is a matter for the future. According to the review, MD will become an integral part of the Alliance's defence posture and an instrument for reinforcing the transatlantic link and indivisibility of NATO's security. MD is also expected to complicate an adversary's planning and to provide damage mitigation and additional decision space in times of crises.

NATO members, however, avoided overestimating MD's role. They highlighted the difficulties in sustaining the effectiveness of an MD system in the long term. They also underscored that MD can only complement, not substitute for nuclear weapons in deterrence. This does not, however, answer questions about a link between the development of MD and the possibility to reduce NATO's reliance on nonstrategic nuclear weapons. It postpones the debate about whether, as Germany advocates, the implementation of a NATO MD system would lead to such reductions.

Conclusions. Despite underscoring the Alliance's cohesion and unity of goals, the review does not reflect a comprehensive consensus about the appropriate mix of nuclear weapons, conventional forces and MD. The result of the review shows that many controversial questions were put aside. DDPR does not resolve controversies such as whether U.S. nuclear weapons should be stationed in Europe or the relationship between various elements in the overall deterrence mixture. The implementation of DDPR provisions is also an open question as it is contingent upon political and financial factors as well as developments in the security environment.

DDPR reflects many Polish expectations. In practice, though, Poland should first further develop its conventional capabilities to demonstrate its contribution to the Alliance. Poland should also actively engage in further debates within the Alliance about the future of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, especially in any conceptual works or analyses tasked to NATO by DDPR.

² M. Terlikowski, "Not As Smart As It Could Be: the NATO Smart Defence Initiative—Chicago and Beyond", *Strategic File*, No. 22.