

## The Broader Context of NATO's Nuclear Policy and Posture

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### Introduction: The Deterrence and Defence Posture Review

At NATO's 2010 Lisbon Summit, Allied Heads of State and Government mandated a comprehensive Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR). The aim was to undertake a "rigorous analysis"<sup>2</sup> of the broader security environment and of the adequacy of NATO's military posture for defence against the full range of security challenges. Issue of the DDPR as a press release at the May 2012 Chicago Summit demonstrated that the review process had indeed covered a lot of ground in the meantime, yet the document provided neither a detailed examination of the international security landscape nor an elaborate analysis of the interaction of nuclear, conventional and missile defence elements. This was hardly surprising. After all, the main purpose of the exercise was to rein in a potentially controversial debate among Allies about NATO's future nuclear posture. To put it differently, the DDPR was meant to reaffirm certain basics that were in danger of getting lost.

And in this respect, the DDPR did indeed deliver: it brought some clarity to a debate that had been increasingly characterised by a profound confusion of means and ends. For several years, the issue of nuclear weapons had been discussed in terms of their global abolition. Nearly every participant in this debate offered his or her own perspective on President Obama's vision of a nuclear-free world, and how this vision could be implemented. The tendency was to present abolition and non-proliferation as the most urgent tasks for mankind, while considerations of deterrence and reassurance were paid scant attention. Worse, by pitting disarmament against deterrence and reassurance, the debate not only amplified differences in political preferences within the Alliance but also created the impression that the security concerns of the most exposed Allies were of little importance to the more fortunate ones. The DDPR put an end to this intellectual confusion. Rather than define arms control and non-proliferation as NATO's overarching objectives,



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<sup>2</sup> Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, Press Release (2012) 063, par. 1, issued on 20 May 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87597.htm?mode=pressrelease](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm?mode=pressrelease)



the review process put these elements in their rightful place: they are instruments in a broader set of tools to achieve the objective called “security”. Moreover, by characterising nuclear weapons as a “core component” of NATO’s overall capabilities, and by stating that “the Alliance’s nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture”, the DDPR struck a more affirmative note than may have been expected on the basis of the debate that preceded it.

As the various taskings that resulted from the DDPR will now have to be implemented, the debate on what constitutes the “right” mix of forces is bound to continue. This provides an opportunity to take a closer look at the security environment, with particular reference to the external factors that will determine the future of NATO’s nuclear dimension; it also makes it possible to draw some general conclusions as to the key principles that should guide NATO’s nuclear evolution. To be sure, the events leading up to the DDPR have clearly shown that this evolution will also be influenced by domestic factors, such as electoral considerations and party politics in Allied countries. It is even conceivable that such domestic concerns will ultimately prevail over broader strategic arguments. After all, as an Alliance of democracies, NATO needs to be responsive to domestic politics in its member countries. Still, as the DDPR process itself has demonstrated, the nuclear dimension is too integral a part of the Alliance to become hostage to parochial domestic politicking or purely national security perspectives. Against this background, with many Allied observers showing little interest in the nuclear dossier, an examination of the broader strategic environment appears all the more imperative.

## Post-Cold War: Nuclear Neglect

Throughout the Cold War nuclear weapons were a centrepiece of NATO’s deterrence policy and posture, the rationale being that they compensated for its conventional military weakness. This meant that the Allies were deeply involved in nuclear matters: though some intra-Alliance debates were highly controversial, there was a clear understanding about the importance of the nuclear dossier, and about the need for joint strategy development. This was particularly evident in the debates

leading to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in the 1960s, with West Germany and Italy making it clear that their agreement to the NPT was contingent on continued US nuclear protection. The importance of keeping abreast of nuclear developments was equally evident in the controversy surrounding NATO’s 1979 “dual track” decision to deploy intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe in response to previous Soviet deployments. Despite massive public protests, Allied governments stood firm – a show of resolve which proved crucial in demonstrating to the Soviet leadership that the Soviet arms build-up was a political and economic failure.

The end of the Cold War took nuclear weapons out of the European debate. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Central and Eastern Europe, nuclear weapons became disentangled from the conventional sphere. Consequently, NATO’s July 1990 London Declaration described nuclear weapons as “weapons of last resort”<sup>3</sup>, reinforcing their political character. This new rhetoric was soon followed by deep cuts in European-based nuclear weapons. Sweeping unilateral reductions by the United States in 1991, echoed by similar Soviet and then Russian commitments, led to the removal of all US nuclear artillery shells and short-range ballistic missile warheads from Europe, leaving only US gravity bombs that could be mounted on US and European dual-capable aircraft (DCA). The fact that Russia never fully lived up to its commitments in this respect was not considered to give serious cause for concern. A potential political crisis that could have emerged from the nuclear implications of NATO enlargement was defused pre-emptively by NATO’s so-called “three no’s”, according to which NATO had “no intention, no plan, and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members nor any need to change any aspect of NATO’s nuclear posture or nuclear policy”<sup>4</sup>. In addition, none of NATO’s post-Cold War military missions – from the Western Balkans to Afghanistan – entailed a nuclear component. Similarly, the EU tended on the whole to exclude the potentially controversial nuclear element from its efforts to become an autonomous foreign and security policy actor.

For almost two decades NATO’s nuclear policy remained virtually unchanged. Only minor adjustments were made to the force posture, notably by withdrawing US nuclear weapons from Greece and the United Kingdom, and by further reducing alert levels and readiness criteria

<sup>3</sup> Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (“The London Declaration”), 6 July 1990, par. 18, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_23693.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23693.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Final Communiqué, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers Session held in Brussels, Press Release M-NAC(DM)-3(96) 172, issued on 18 December 1996, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_25057.htm?mode=pressrelease](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25057.htm?mode=pressrelease)



applicable to DCA earmarked for nuclear missions. None of these measures were made public; they became known only long after they had been implemented. However, the Allies repeatedly stated that the principle of broad Allied participation in nuclear matters was still considered essential to their security. New NATO members entering the Alliance in the wake of the Cold War joined the NPT, where they would be familiarised with NATO's nuclear "acquis". With the nuclear debate increasingly confined to the non-proliferation community and remnants of the old anti-nuclear movements, those involved continued – albeit without much resonance – to criticise the incompatibility of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements with global non-proliferation and disarmament goals.<sup>5</sup>

### Twelve Characteristics of the “Second Nuclear Age”

By contrast with views in Western Europe, where declining interest in nuclear matters was a direct result of an improving regional security situation, in the post-Cold War period the United States' perception of nuclear developments remained far less sanguine. As early as the mid-1990s the term “second nuclear age” entered the discussion, implying that the end of the Cold War had only marked the closing of one particular chapter in the history of nuclear weapons, and that another was just about to begin. While the non-proliferation community at first hesitated to use the term, as it seemed intended to justify an assertive counter-proliferation policy, it has since then become widely accepted in the sense of an age marked by the spread of nuclear weapons “for reasons having nothing to do with the Soviet-American rivalry of the first nuclear age”.<sup>6</sup> A closer examination of the major characteristics of the current security environment – not all of which were initially subsumed under the term “second nuclear age” – suggests that the European Allies too can no longer afford to largely ignore nuclear developments, as they have during the past two decades. These characteristics can be summarised in twelve main points, which will now be briefly illustrated.

- The first feature of note is the commercialisation and

privatisation of proliferation. Until the 1990s, nuclear proliferation was understood as a process involving state actors. However, the semi-private nuclear smuggling network of the Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan supplied several would-be nuclear powers such as Iraq, Libya and North Korea with nuclear technology, know-how, and even blueprints for nuclear warheads. Much proliferation thus takes place nowadays outside the interstate regime that the NPT seeks to regulate. This has fundamental consequences for international security: if activities in support of proliferation are no longer politically but financially motivated, they are much harder to forecast. And buying from private sellers means that even countries that are technically inferior can acquire nuclear technology and expertise. All this makes the international environment far less predictable.

- Equally characteristic of the current scenario is the second current trend: cooperation between proliferators. Such cooperation, whether politically (North Korea and Iran exchanging missile test data) or financially (North Korea building a nuclear reactor for Syria) motivated, adds a further element of unpredictability to the international environment. Sharing technical expertise on ballistic missile developments or the results of nuclear tests speeds up development times, minimises the need for testing, and cuts development costs. Cooperation between likeminded states may even allow a country to become a nuclear power without developing a full nuclear programme of its own: certain Gulf States might thus be able to purchase entire weapons from powers with which they have political or religious affinities. These weapons could then be mounted on already available DCA or missiles.<sup>7</sup> Such a development could change the international security landscape – including that of the NATO Allies – literally overnight.

- A third point to note is the migration of nuclear expertise. Since the Manhattan Project, which included several European physicists, almost all national nuclear programmes have been developed by experts from several nations. The end of the Soviet Union left thousands of nuclear experts unemployed: many of them offered their expertise to countries like Iran or Iraq, either individually

<sup>5</sup> Allegations that NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements violate Articles I and II of the NPT remain weak. The Soviet Union did not challenge these arrangements during the negotiations, and the NGO assertions as to their violating the letter or “the spirit” of the NPT began to appear long after the NPT had entered into effect. See Letter from Undersecretary of State Nicholas B. Katzenbach to Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, 10 April 1968, with attached questions and answers, memorandum of conversation, West German “non-paper” and proposed declaration; US Department of State Memorandum to US Acting Secretary of State, 5 April 1968 [Secret], <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb253/doc18.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See Fred C. Iklé, The Second Coming of the Nuclear Age, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No.1, January/February 1996, pp. 119-128; Paul Bracken, The Structure of the Second Nuclear Age, *Orbis*, Vol. 47, No. 3, Summer 2003, pp. 399-413.

<sup>7</sup> Many experts believe that such an approach could be chosen by Saudi Arabia. See Christopher Clary and Mara E. Karlin, The Pak-Saudi Nuke, and How to Stop It, *The American Interest*, July-August 2012.



or through the A.Q. Khan network.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the end of the South African nuclear programme led many nuclear experts to look for employment elsewhere. There are also well documented examples of Indian experts in Iran and Pakistani experts in North Korea and Myanmar.<sup>9</sup> This migration of nuclear expertise is another factor of unpredictability: ironically, by forcing nuclear specialists to find a job elsewhere, the end of a nuclear programme in one country could accelerate the nuclearisation of another.

- The fourth salient feature of the current security environment is the risk of a fundamentalist nuclear-weapon state emerging. This is a far more realistic prospect than the much discussed risk of nuclear terrorism: building nuclear weapons requires elaborate infrastructure, which only states can provide.<sup>10</sup> One credible (though, fortunately, still theoretical) scenario is that a radical regime might come to power in a nuclear-weapon state and prove willing to transfer nuclear weapons to likeminded terrorist groups. The main challenge, however, will be the unpredictability of such a regime in a crisis: once political and religious radicalism - with its glorification of martyrdom - enters the equation, the survival instinct so essential to a stable deterrence regime is missing.<sup>11</sup>

- A fifth characteristic of the current scenario is the continued interest in civilian nuclear energy. While the 2011 Fukushima disaster may mean fewer new nuclear power plants in the years ahead, increasing energy prices and the effects of climate change will nevertheless sustain a significant push for nuclear energy. Many countries insist on their “inalienable right” to use civilian nuclear energy (sometimes deliberately misinterpreted as the right to master the full nuclear fuel cycle): this option, which is enshrined in the NPT, is regarded as a major symbol of sovereignty and modernity. However, the relatively short step from low-enriched reactor-grade uranium to highly enriched weapons-grade uranium could be undertaken covertly. Thus, unless an entirely new level of safeguards

can be agreed, the global quest for nuclear energy means that a growing number of countries will acquire the status of “turnkey-states”, allowing them to convert their civilian nuclear programme into a military nuclear weapons programme at short notice. This adds yet another element of unpredictability to the international system.

- A sixth feature of the global security landscape is the erosion of the non-proliferation norm by economic and energy interests. Iran is a case in point, as its status as a major producer of oil and gas has made it difficult to agree on tougher sanctions. Even as sanctions have been tightened, several countries have made deals for purchase of Iranian energy; others are trying to circumvent the sanctions by such expedients as reflagging ships. With the search for affordable energy set to heat up in the coming decades, the implications for the NPT regime are bleak.

- The seventh point of concern regarding the international environment is the likelihood of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East triggering a cascade effect. While past assumptions about “proliferation cascades” have been proven wrong, it is widely believed that Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would lead several neighbouring states to follow suit. Sunni Saudi Arabia has officially stated that it might go nuclear should its Shiite rival Iran acquire the bomb.<sup>12</sup> Other states in the region have been less outspoken, yet their behaviour shows clear signs of “hedging” against a nuclear Iran. Europe might thus in future be faced with a neighbouring region where every conventional conflict would entail the risk of nuclear escalation. For Turkey, as the only NATO Ally directly bordering the region, a multiplication of nuclear-armed states in the Middle East would mean a fundamental transformation of its security environment.

- The eighth characteristic of the current security environment is the modernisation of nuclear arsenals. While this means a quantitative reduction in some cases, China, Pakistan and India are actually increasing

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<sup>8</sup> In a 1990 letter, A.Q. Khan offered to turn Iraq into a nuclear power within just three years for \$150 million. Khan’s network would provide all the necessary equipment, including experts. The last paragraph of Khan’s offer reads: “If absolutely necessary 2 of every 3 scientists can be pursued [sic] to resign [from their current job] and join the new assignment.” The letter was discovered in Iraq by IAEA inspectors in 1995. See David Albright, *Peddling Peril: How the Secret Nuclear Trade Arms America’s Enemies*, New York, The Free Press, 2010, pp. 82-83.

<sup>9</sup> See Hans Rühle, Nuclear Mercenaries. WMD expertise goes to the highest bidder, in *IP Journal*, 28/11/2011, <https://ip-journal.dgap.org/en/ip-journal/topics/nuclear-mercenaries>

<sup>10</sup> A more likely scenario is the “dirty bomb”, i.e. terrorists spread radioactive material by putting it around a conventional explosive. This may contaminate a limited area (e.g. an airport), but its main effect will be psychological rather than physical.

<sup>11</sup> In the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara urged Russia to launch its Cuban-based nuclear missiles at the United States. Russia’s refusal was based on the argument that, irrespective of whether the Cuban leaders were prepared to die for their revolutionary cause, Russia was not. See Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 2001, p. 306.

<sup>12</sup> Saudi officials have repeatedly stated that a nuclear Iran would compel their country to seek a nuclear capability of its own. See Saudi Arabia To ‘Immediately’ Go Nuclear Should Iran Develop Bomb”, *Huffington Post*, 10/02/2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/02/10/saudi-arabia-nuclear-bomb\\_n\\_1267571.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/02/10/saudi-arabia-nuclear-bomb_n_1267571.html) On the Pakistan-India rivalry, see Peroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012.





their respective arsenals and show little concern for transparency. Given the deliberately ambiguous nuclear rhetoric of Pakistan and (even more so) of India, each of the two suspects that the other may follow a “first use” doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Since their nuclear arsenals also include short-range systems, the implications for crisis stability could be severe. These developments not only demonstrate that the call for global nuclear abolition is largely limited to the West; they also mean that the gap between the nuclear “haves” and “have-nots” in certain volatile regions will grow further – thus increasing the nervousness of the “have-nots” about securing credible US protection.

- The ninth element to factor into assessment of the current environment is the role of nuclear weapons as a means to compensate for conventional weakness, emulating the approach adopted by NATO throughout the Cold War. Russia has thus in recent years adopted a more “nuclear” rhetoric, and even conducted exercises simulating the employment of nuclear weapons against NATO Allies. In a similar vein, Pakistan’s emphasis on the effectiveness of its nuclear arsenal appears to be motivated by its conventional inferiority vis-à-vis India. A similar concern with compensating for conventional inferiority was also evident in Saddam Hussein’s attempts to acquire nuclear weapons in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> As the West will remain conventionally superior to most of its potential rivals, the incentive for some of these states to acquire a nuclear “counter-deterrent” will remain. Hence, if the West wants to retain an activist international posture that includes the possibility of intervention, it must contemplate its risk of exposure to nuclear strikes or other weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

- Tenth on the list of relevant security factors is the possibility of other WMD becoming a “game changer”. The 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review provided a telling example: one of its aims was to send out a signal about the reduced salience of nuclear weapons in US defence policy as a result of strengthened negative security assurances and a “sole purpose” declaration. Both aims were only partially met, because “the evolution and proliferation of the biological weapons threat” did not allow the United States “to adopt a universal policy that deterring nuclear attack is the sole purpose of nuclear weapons”.<sup>15</sup> Non-

nuclear WMD remain a factor to be reckoned with, for a number of reasons: bioweapons programmes are hard to detect, the relevant technologies are often dual-capable, and many states are interested in acquiring bioweapons expertise. The debate over Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile, which erupted in the fall of 2012, reinforced such concerns.

- The eleventh characteristic of the “second nuclear age” is the emergence of robust new non-proliferation approaches. With the complex verification regime engendered by the NPT, there is widespread agreement that this system cannot cope with more recent cases of non-compliance and that additional measures are needed. Examples of such measures are the leading role played by the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) on the Iran dossier, which has now led to an unprecedented sanctions regime; UNSC Resolution 1540, which encourages countries to tighten their national non-proliferation legislation; and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which seeks to establish new rules for intercepting ships with illicit cargoes such as WMD. While NATO is only indirectly supporting some of these developments, such as the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540, the discussion about a potential role of the Alliance in the PSI indicates the possibility of its becoming more actively involved in non-traditional non-proliferation schemes.

- The final characteristic of the current nuclear landscape is the continued centrality of the US’ extended deterrence commitments. While some analysts maintain that nuclear-weapon states have remained limited in number as a result of the norms set by the NPT, a closer look suggests otherwise. For most nations, the option of becoming a nuclear-weapon state simply does not offer prospective security advantages outweighing the enormous financial costs and political ramifications. However, a change in a nation’s political and military environment can also alter its cost-benefit calculus. Past experience in Europe and, even more so, current developments in Asia and the Middle East suggest that nuclear abstinence remains contingent on US nuclear security assurances. It is no coincidence that indications of a potential nuclear domino effect have become visible precisely in the regions where doubts about US commitment are most serious.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of such mutual suspicions see Bruno Tertrais, Pakistan’s nuclear and WMD programmes: status, evolution and risks, EU Non-proliferation Consortium, *Non-Proliferation Paper* No. 19, July 2012.

<sup>14</sup> See Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, Mark E. Stout (Eds.), *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant’s Regime, 1978-2001*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 223.

<sup>15</sup> *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010, p. viii.

<sup>16</sup> In the past, both Taiwan and South Korea tried their hand at civilian nuclear programmes with clear military applications. These programmes were stopped after Washington exerted massive political pressure. On Japan’s past nuclear ambiguity, see “Japan ‘sought US nuclear help’”, *BBC News*, 22 December 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7795246.stm>



## Implications for NATO's Nuclear Policy and Posture

The above characteristics of the international security environment suggest that globalisation is challenging many long-held assumptions on how proliferation proceeds; that the potential for further nuclear proliferation remains considerable; that future proliferation patterns are becoming harder to predict; and that US security assurances continue to play a significant role in containing nuclear proliferation. While these developments do not translate into clear-cut answers to the question of NATO's future nuclear dimension, they do lead to a number of recommendations about certain principles that may help the Allies in their attempts to adapt NATO's policies and posture.

The first of these tenets is that nuclear weapons remain a major political factor on the international scene: as a means of achieving status, as a potential threat, and as a means of deterrence. As a result, NATO must continue to keep abreast of nuclear and other WMD developments. To maintain a high degree of situational awareness, it needs to make full use of its existing tools, such as intelligence-sharing mechanisms and the political consultation process. Above all, however, Allies must not consider discussion of nuclear developments (e.g. the security implications of a nuclear-armed Iran) as off-limits because of its controversial nature. At present, pertinent security issues such as the nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea are put on the agenda by the partner countries most concerned rather than by Allies. While the dialogue with partner countries must indeed encompass nuclear developments, Allies should also be willing and able to discuss nuclear matters regularly, on their own initiative, and without having to be prodded into such discussion by third parties or by controversial political initiatives of individual Allies.

The second important point is that the US' extended deterrence remains a crucial means of reassuring NATO Europe (especially after Washington's "Asian pivot"), as well as of preventing proliferation in the Middle East and Asia. The current debates in South Korea and Japan show that the credibility of the "Asian model", according to which US extended deterrence does not require the stationing of US nuclear weapons in the region, is being called into question each time a crisis emerges. This debate – which Washington has sought to contain by institutionalising closer nuclear consultations with both

countries – suggests that, even in the age of global nuclear strike capabilities, geography still matters. As indicated by the debate in Asia and by discussion during the DDPR, countries that perceive a threat prefer a physical US nuclear presence over a mere "virtual" presence – all the more so as a capability that has been removed is unlikely ever to return. Retaining a US nuclear presence in Europe (as institutionalised in NATO) should thus be seen as a benefit rather than a burden, as it spares Europe the nervousness that has become so palpable in Asia.

The third important point is that, for NATO to remain a "nuclear Alliance" as postulated in both the Strategic Concept and the DDPR, it is not enough that NATO's three nuclear-weapon states simply maintain their arsenals. Certain nuclear participation arrangements are also necessary. While no precise explanation of the term "nuclear Alliance" has ever been advanced, the interpretation that it refers to the participation of non-nuclear Allies can be deduced from several factors. First, since NATO's early days nuclear weapons have been deployed in Allied units in Europe. Second, when US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton introduced the term at the Tallinn Foreign Ministers' meeting in April 2010 in order to rein in a potentially acrimonious debate about the future of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, her intervention was widely understood as a reaffirmation of existing nuclear arrangements. Third, the DDPR itself establishes a link between the term "nuclear Alliance" and participation arrangements.<sup>17</sup> The wording "nuclear Alliance" thus suggests that NATO's non-nuclear-weapon states can play a continuing role in the nuclear mission, including consultations and planning.

The fourth major consideration regarding future policy is that, if participation is an essential feature of NATO as a "nuclear Alliance", keeping the dual-capable aircraft (DCA) option effective would appear to be the most logical course. The DCA mission not only ensures that the physical aspect of "nuclear sharing" is maintained; it also allows many Allies who do not host such aircraft to play a part in the nuclear mission (e.g. through the suppression of enemy air defences). DCA countries thus bear a unique responsibility, particularly vis-à-vis NATO's easternmost member states, by enabling them to contribute to the collective sharing of nuclear risks and burdens. NATO's three "nuclear no's", stated in 1996, also imply that nuclear arrangements will be maintained to satisfy the security interests of the 12 Allies which joined subsequently. However, if the DCA option were no longer

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<sup>17</sup> "Consistent with our commitment to remain a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist, Allies agree that the NAC will task the appropriate committees to develop concepts for how to ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies concerned ... in their nuclear sharing arrangements, including in case NATO were to decide to reduce its reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe." DDPR, para. 12.



considered feasible, and traditional “sharing” ceased to exist through lack of hardware, NATO would have to develop other forms of participation. Examples include enhanced nuclear consultations, liaison arrangements for European officers in US nuclear command posts, and reconstitution mechanisms for returning US-based aircraft to Europe when required.<sup>18</sup> None of these measures could be considered “nuclear sharing” in the traditional sense,<sup>19</sup> and they might thus cast doubt on whether NATO would still be a “nuclear Alliance” as stated in the Strategic Concept and the DDPR. However, they would at least enable NATO to retain a certain – albeit modest – nuclear dimension. This might also help ensure that NATO’s three nuclear-armed members are not considered solely responsible as a result of non-nuclear Allies failing to express their political support in international forums. By the same token, were individual Allies to conclude that they no longer want to host DCA, they should at least volunteer to shoulder other nuclear-related responsibilities – e.g., providing nuclear-certified aircrews, hosting and supporting other Allies’ DCA, or contributing to the suppression of enemy air defences.

The fifth guiding principle is that a NATO-wide missile defence system is no substitute for NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangements. As nuclear-weapon states grow in number, ballistic missile defence will gain in importance, especially in crisis regions. Against a technologically weaker opponent armed with only a few missiles, missile defence offers important damage limitation options, and it can provide a degree of deterrence by denial. However, as the DDPR itself emphasises, while missile defence can augment nuclear deterrence, it cannot substitute for it.<sup>20</sup> Some analysts have suggested that missile defence could replace traditional nuclear sharing arrangements, arguing that it would provide NATO with a less controversial and more forward-looking system of sharing than one centred on aircraft-delivered nuclear weapons.<sup>21</sup> It remains doubtful, however, whether European participation in a NATO-wide missile defence system could prove a real substitute for nuclear sharing or other forms of nuclear

participation. NATO’s integrated air defence, at least, has never been regarded as a dedicated “sharing” mechanism, but simply as a jointly operated essential capability. This suggests that, rather than create analytically and politically questionable linkages between nuclear weapons and missile defence, it is more appropriate to see them as complementary instruments useful for coping with a wide variety of threats.

The sixth fundamental consideration for the future, as the DDPR implies, is that NATO’s nuclear posture must be linked to global developments and not just to Russia’s nuclear arsenal.<sup>22</sup> The current lack of Russian interest in arms control regarding sub-strategic nuclear weapons may “help” NATO to maintain its own nuclear posture for the time being,<sup>23</sup> as the discussions in the DDPR on sub-strategic nuclear weapons made it very clear that many Allies were not willing to give up something without receiving anything in return. However, this linkage with reciprocal Russian concessions also means that the evolution of NATO’s nuclear posture, including politically sensitive intra-Alliance arrangements, would de facto be determined by Moscow. This would not only mean an undue “nuclearisation” of NATO-Russia relations but also divert Allied attention away from developments that may prove to be far more important drivers of NATO’s nuclear dimension, namely the potential nuclearisation of parts of the Middle East and Asia. Despite the undeniable importance of seeking enhanced nuclear transparency with Russia, it would thus be inappropriate to reduce nuclear deterrence issues in NATO to a bilateral NATO-Russia dimension reminiscent of the Cold War and out of touch with global developments.

The seventh point to acknowledge is that NATO must deepen its engagement with the NGO community, notably with security experts in think tanks. The second nuclear age should also lead to a new era of how NATO interacts with the academic community. Given the non-nuclear proclivities of many NGOs, such a dialogue may often be difficult and sometimes even acrimonious, but

<sup>18</sup> See Karl-Heinz Kamp and Robertus C. M. Remkes, Options for NATO Nuclear Sharing Arrangements, in Steve Andreasen and Isabelle Williams (Eds.), *Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe. A Framework for Action*, NTI, Washington, D.C., 2011, pp. 76-95.

<sup>19</sup> Unlike the sharing of nuclear risks and burdens, the term “nuclear sharing” has long been considered to refer to technical arrangements specific to NATO. This understanding is also implicit in the debates in Japan and South Korea, where occasional suggestions to develop sharing mechanisms with the US according to the current “German model” are meant to copy NATO’s DCA arrangements. See David S. Yost, US Extended Deterrence in NATO and North-East Asia, in Perspectives on Extended Deterrence, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Recherches & Documents, No. 3, 2010, pp. 30-31.

<sup>20</sup> See DDPR, para. 20.

<sup>21</sup> See Oliver Thränert, NATO, Missile Defence and Extended Deterrence, in *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, December 2009/January 2010, pp. 63-76.

<sup>22</sup> See DDPR, paras. 26, 27 and 34.

<sup>23</sup> It is widely assumed that Russia’s requirements for sub-strategic nuclear weapons are much broader than NATO’s, notably because of the China factor. See Roger N. McDermott, Russia’s Conventional Armed Forces Reform and Nuclear Posture to 2020, in Stephen J. Blank (Ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present, and Future*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, November 2011, pp. 33-97.



NATO must not shy away from the debate. The dialogue between NATO's International Staff and various think tanks that emerged in the run-up to the DDPR and throughout the entire process was most encouraging, as it sparked off a series of incisive analyses that went beyond unquestioning disarmament advocacy and sought to take the security concerns of Allies into account. Hence, these analyses contributed to NATO's intra-Alliance discussions. In addition to maintaining its links with the academic community, NATO should also cultivate links with the NPT Review Conferences.<sup>24</sup> In addition, while a major public diplomacy campaign is neither necessary nor feasible, pro-NATO, pro-nuclear deterrence experts and politicians in key Allied countries should be encouraged to state the case for NATO as a nuclear Alliance.

Finally, NATO needs to develop a new nuclear narrative. This must be centred on "security", not non-proliferation or disarmament. At its core must be a much stronger emphasis on global security developments, including the increasing risk of nuclear proliferation. As with missile defence, NATO's nuclear dimension must be explained as an affordable insurance against unpredictable developments in a volatile international environment. A new nuclear narrative also means that attempts by Western governments to de-legitimise nuclear weapons for the sake of global non-proliferation – an approach that lies at the heart of "global zero" and similar initiatives – must be sufficiently qualified so as not to jeopardise the continued justification of NATO's nuclear deterrent. The Strategic Concept's formula "to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons" offers the most sensible guideline, as it puts the emphasis on broader security considerations and avoids demonising nuclear weapons. A particular point that should be made more explicitly is the broad Allied participation in NATO's nuclear dimension: this participation is an expression of the collectivity which is the hallmark of the Alliance, ensuring that nuclear weapons do not simply become a source of national prestige for nuclear-weapon states. In addition, another key part of this narrative must be

the "re-branding" of nuclear sharing arrangements. The rationale for nuclear sharing must be reversed: instead of treating it as a Cold War legacy, sharing must be endorsed as a modern means of organising nuclear protection collectively, responsibly, and in a non-provocative way. Hence, NATO's "smart defence" narrative should also be extended to nuclear matters. In an Alliance that has made the search for cost-effective defence through collective solutions a major item on its agenda, nuclear sharing must be explained as an organic part of truly "smart" deterrence and defence in the age of globalisation.

### **Conclusion: Consolidating NATO's Nuclear Acquis**

The above reasoning suggests that European-based US nuclear weapons and associated arrangements should be maintained not only for a few more years but for a much longer period. In addition to certain technical requirements, such as the modernisation of DCA and the life extension of the B-61 gravity bomb, this would also imply that NATO evolves organisationally to better reflect 21st century requirements. As the DDPR put it, "sustained leadership focus and institutional excellence for the nuclear mission and planning guidance"<sup>25</sup> are essential to achieve this objective. Specifically, NATO's political leadership should take a more than occasional interest in the political and technical/military aspects of NATO's nuclear dimension, notably in the work of the Nuclear Planning Group, NATO's senior political body on nuclear policy issues, and of its advisory body, the High Level Group. Sustained interest in these, coupled with a greater effort to reaffirm and explain NATO's nuclear character, should go a long way towards achieving Allied aspirations as expressed in the DDPR, namely to maintain an effective deterrent while creating an environment for further reducing the role and number of nuclear weapons. If NATO is to remain a "nuclear Alliance" for as long as nuclear weapons exist, the justification of its nuclear "acquis" must be clear and unapologetic.

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<sup>24</sup> In 2010 NATO was for the first time invited as an observer to the NPT Review Conference.

<sup>25</sup> DDPR, para. 11.