

Reassembling a More Credible NATO Nuclear Policy and Posture

JOAN ROHLFING, ISABELLE WILLIAMS,
AND STEVE ANDREASEN

In January 2007, George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn wrote the first in a series of essays published in *the Wall Street Journal* calling for a global effort to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons, prevent their spread into potentially dangerous hands, and ultimately end them as a threat to the world. One of the important steps they proposed to reduce nuclear dangers was to start a dialogue, including within NATO and with Russia, on consolidating the nuclear weapons designed for forward deployment to enhance their security, and as a first step toward careful accounting for them and their eventual elimination.¹

Accomplishing this task will require careful thought and coordinated action within both NATO and Russia, as well as a strategy for engagement between them—the subject of former Senator Sam Nunn’s featured essay for this report. To assist in developing such an approach and as a direct contribution to the ongoing NATO Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR), the Nuclear Threat Initiative commissioned a series of nine policy papers authored and reviewed by a distinguished group of international experts. This collection of papers on NATO nuclear policy analyzes policy and force structure options open to NATO members and aims to promote dialogue and new thinking on several key issues and questions, including:

- ▶ Can/should NATO’s nuclear declaratory policy be modified to further reduce the role of nuclear weapons in NATO security policy consistent with the recent changes to U.S. and U.K. declaratory policy?

1. George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, “Toward A Nuclear-Free World,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 2008.

- ▶ What are the security concerns and related risks associated with NATO’s existing nuclear posture, and how can these concerns and risks be reduced?
- ▶ Are the current nuclear sharing arrangements sustainable in the long term for NATO members, and what are the alternatives that maintain wide participation in nuclear operations and planning?
- ▶ What reassurance measures are required for NATO members and partners consistent with the new NATO Strategic Concept, and what are the benefits and risks involved?
- ▶ What are the next steps in U.S./NATO–Russia discussions and cooperation on non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW), missile defense, and nonthreatening conventional force deployments?
- ▶ How does the debate over NATO nuclear policy and NSNW—deployed by both NATO and Russia—relate to Asian security?

This study has defined NSNW as all nuclear weapons intended for use with non-strategic nuclear delivery systems—that is, any nuclear weapon not intended for use on a long-range ballistic missile (ICBM or SLBM) or heavy bomber. NSNW can be delivered by aircraft or missiles deployed on land or at sea, as well as by artillery, torpedoes, or mines.

BACKGROUND

As detailed in Chapter 1, in the lead up to the November 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit, the complexities of the nuclear issues and the many different positions represented within the Alliance made it difficult for NATO members to agree on several fundamental issues relating to NATO nuclear policy. The Strategic Concept adopted at Lisbon embraced two core principles: that NATO was committed to the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons according to the goals of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and for as long as there are nuclear weapons, NATO would remain a nuclear Alliance.

In this context, the 2010 Strategic Concept also contained key language on nuclear policy-related issues, including:

- ▶ The “supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the U.S.” The Concept also notes “the independent 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.”

- ▶ Members will “seek to create the conditions for further reductions (of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe) in the future... In any future reductions, our aim should be to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on its nuclear weapons in Europe and relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members. Any further steps must take into account the disparity with the greater Russian stockpiles of short-range nuclear weapons.”
- ▶ Members will “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.”
- ▶ No declaratory policy was outlined, although the Concept noted, “The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote.”

To further advance the dialogue on NATO nuclear policy both in design and practice beyond these basic principles, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) was tasked at Lisbon with reviewing NATO’s overall nuclear and conventional posture in deterring and defending against a full range of threats, including “NATO’s nuclear posture, and missile defense and other means of strategic deterrence and defense.” The DDPR is not therefore intended to reopen the broad concepts outlined above that were settled in Lisbon. Rather, it provides a process for members to further discuss issues that were difficult to find consensus on: the role of nuclear weapons, including declaratory policy, in deterrence and defense; the role NATO intends to play in future arms control efforts—primarily with Russia; the willingness and ability of members to sustain the current nuclear mission, as well as alternatives to NATO’s existing nuclear arrangements; and the future direction of relations with Russia. The review also importantly allows members to assess whether the Alliance has the appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities to address current and emerging threats and to ensure that the various components of NATO strategy relate to each other in a coherent way.

WHAT IS NEEDED FROM THE DDPR

With respect to the nuclear component of deterrence and defense, all members agree that NATO should remain a nuclear Alliance and have committed to maintaining deterrence and advancing nonproliferation and arms control in the context of creating the conditions to move toward a world free of nuclear weapons. All members therefore have a responsibility to demonstrate that NATO’s nuclear posture and policies reflect these commitments and are tailored in the most

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effective way to ensure they strengthen Alliance security; address the complexity of threats, both old and new, now facing the Alliance; and take into consideration NATO's broader role and mission, including cooperation and partnerships with key global states.

In the crucial months ahead, NATO members should conduct the DDPR deliberations within the context of assessing the cost-benefit ratio of either maintaining the status quo or implementing policy changes. This includes a careful consideration of the security context—including existing and emerging threats—as well as political, security, and financial costs.

Security Context

NATO nuclear policy today has its roots in the Cold War, when NATO faced a fundamentally different set of security challenges. Dramatic political, security, and economic developments have occurred since then: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact; the Balkans war; the addition of new NATO member states; terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe; the war in Afghanistan; the global financial crisis and the ongoing debt crisis in Europe and the United States; and most recently, NATO intervention in Libya. NATO needs to continuously assess its evolving security context and existing and emerging threats and take these developments into consideration when reviewing its deterrence and defense posture. Maintaining the status quo, with its attendant costs and risks, can undermine, not strengthen, NATO security.

Political Costs

In the aftermath of President Obama's 2009 Prague speech proclaiming support for working toward the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, other European NATO member states also made clear their strong support for U.S. efforts to reinvigorate the nuclear disarmament agenda. The 2010 Strategic Concept, therefore, committed members to work toward creating the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons. Given this commitment by NATO and the global momentum behind dialogue and action on addressing nuclear dangers, members should consider the potential political cost of announcing next year a "status quo outcome" on NATO nuclear policy and posture—aspects of which have not been revised for decades—and the message this will send to other countries.

One of the key issues is whether NATO will adopt a new declaratory policy. Such a statement has traditionally played an important role in communicating how nuclear weapons contribute to collective defense and deterrence and support the Alliance's arms control and disarmament commitments. As explained in Chapter 2, with both the United States and the United Kingdom adopting new

declaratory policies that make more explicit how remote the potential is for any nuclear use, it would appear there is a good case for NATO to do the same.

NATO members hosting U.S. NSNW and deploying dual capable aircraft (DCA) will also need to consider whether they are willing to invest the political capital necessary to achieve Parliamentary approval for any new nuclear-related investments, which could be viewed by their publics as “nuclear modernization” or “nuclear rearmament.”

Security Costs

One key risk that NATO must address is that of a terrorist attack on a European base with U.S. forward deployed weapons. As discussed in Chapter 3, no matter what degree NATO assesses the risk of such an attack, the political and security consequences of any infiltration of a site would be potentially severe for the Alliance. Therefore, as long as U.S. NSNW remain deployed in Europe, all of NATO has a stake in their security, and those countries possessing or storing nuclear weapons on their territory must be committed to responsible stewardship. NATO should assess what security upgrades are necessary to weapons and bases, evaluate the potential costs of implementing such upgrades—which could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars—and assign the responsibility for these costs. If resources are not available, steps such as further consolidations of these weapons should be implemented without delay.

Financial Costs

Discussions on NATO nuclear policy will be held against the backdrop of a significant decline in the defense spending of NATO European members. Members will need to assess all capabilities and resources based on emerging threats and declining budgets. Financial considerations will therefore likely have a significant effect on how members view the role of nuclear weapons. For example, NATO members hosting U.S. NSNW will need to consider the financial cost of maintaining the status quo—including the cost of maintaining DCA, either by extending the life of existing aircraft or providing funding for nuclear-capable replacement aircraft, in particular, the Joint Strike Fighter (a key issue for Belgium and the Netherlands). NATO members should also take into account the negative effect of defense cuts on efforts to “reassure” certain Allies of NATO’s commitment to Article 5.

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COMMON THEMES

There are several common elements and themes that run through the following chapters, underscoring the importance of the DDPR process and—potentially—providing a blueprint for reassembling a more credible NATO nuclear policy and posture.

Nuclear Sharing Arrangements

Certain NATO members cannot now envision NATO nuclear policy without the current nuclear arrangements, including NATO DCA and U.S. NSNW deployed in Europe; to some, an end to the current arrangements would mean nonnuclear Allies are no longer directly involved in the Alliance’s nuclear deterrence posture. There is also a growing recognition within NATO, however—including those states that currently operate NATO DCA—that the status quo is not sustainable, and that there are alternatives to the current arrangements that would maintain the nuclear sharing even without U.S. forward based NSNW and could provide a more credible and sustainable posture for NATO. As explained in Chapter 4, discussions on these alternatives should focus on four dimensions: nuclear information sharing, nuclear consultations, common planning, and common execution. Members, therefore, need to assess how to proceed with NATO’s nuclear sharing mechanisms. If current arrangements are not deemed sustainable in the long term, NATO must begin a serious dialogue on how these alternatives might be developed and implemented by consensus within NATO in ways that strengthen the Alliance.

Relationship with Russia

All NATO members recognize the importance of the relationship with Russia, and no country stands to benefit if the relationship deteriorates. U.S./NATO–Russian cooperation is required to reduce nuclear threats in the Euro-Atlantic region, as well as to move forward on missile defense and conventional force limitations.

Although the U.S.-Russia bilateral relationship may be stronger than it has been for several years, it is questionable whether the same is true for the NATO–Russia relationship. There is still an element of deep mistrust and suspicion in the Euro-Atlantic region that undermines attempts at cooperation between NATO and Russia. Breaking down these persistent barriers to cooperation will require political will from the highest levels in Washington, Brussels, and Moscow.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, a key problem for NATO is addressing the concerns of individual member states, which have their own unique histories and experience with Russia. Reassurance—particularly of Central and Eastern European (CEE) states—has therefore become a central issue for the Alliance, including with regard to the role of nuclear weapons in NATO security policy. Given that many reassurance measures focused on CEE states could be perceived negatively by Russia, NATO will need to give careful consideration to how it can balance effective reassurance within NATO and deepening cooperation with Russia—so that “reassurance” and “cooperation” can be mutually reinforcing rather than competing goals.

Linkage

As explored in Chapters 7 and 8, although conventional forces, missile defense, and nuclear deterrence are independent issues with their own unique dimensions, they are closely related—perhaps most notably in their relationship to Russia and Euro-Atlantic security. Devising a comprehensive approach within NATO (and in Moscow) that takes into account this interrelationship among issues will be vital but challenging—and as discussed in Chapter 9, this will also need to be done with an eye toward Asia.

The DDPR should work to develop a flexible and durable policy framework that recognizes these interrelationships—and can be reviewed periodically and adjusted when necessary. Rigid formulas for linkage are unlikely to improve NATO security or facilitate progress with Russia; by the same token, a policy that fails to take into account the overlap between conventional forces, missile defense, and nuclear deterrence—and Russian perceptions and interests on these issues—is unlikely to succeed.

CONCLUSION

Each of the following chapters makes a substantial new contribution to the discussion of NATO nuclear policy. Together, they can inform further policy work within NATO and in capitals on the vital questions that remain to be answered, and provide the outlines of a new NATO nuclear policy that can significantly improve NATO security and advance the Alliance’s stated global non-proliferation and arms control objectives.

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