

FEATURED ESSAY:
“The Race Between Cooperation and Catastrophe”
BY SAM NUNN

EXCERPT

Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

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FEATURED ESSAY

The Race Between Cooperation and Catastrophe

SAM NUNN

THE NUCLEAR THREAT, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

My first visit to NATO came during the single most dangerous moment for the United States, NATO, and the Soviet Union during the four decades of the Cold War: the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. I was a 24-year-old staff lawyer with the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee on an Air Force-led trip to NATO. During those tense days, President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval quarantine around Cuba—and to the world’s great relief, Premier Nikita Khrushchev ordered all Soviet nuclear missiles removed from the island. During detailed daily classified briefings to our delegation during the course of 10 days, I recognized how close the world was to nuclear war. I pledged to myself to try to reduce these dangers if I ever had the chance.

I returned to NATO in 1974 as a newly elected Senator from Georgia. At that time, the concept and practice of nuclear deterrence by the United States and NATO—including the deployment of thousands of shorter-range American non-strategic (or “tactical”) nuclear weapons in Europe—played a crucial role in NATO’s strategy and defense posture.

During that 1974 trip, several important points were evident to me:

- a) NATO’s conventional weaknesses combined with the enormous Soviet forward-based tank and artillery forces arrayed against NATO made front-line American and NATO commanders not only reliant on first use of tactical nuclear weapons, but more dangerously, *early* first use—an unspoken but grim reality. A nuclear release request by battlefield commanders was likely at the outset of any serious military conflict based on the concern that nuclear

FEATURED ESSAY: KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ The Cold War is now 20 years behind us, yet the world continues to live with large strategic nuclear forces on high alert and thousands of tactical nuclear weapons located in certain NATO states and Russia.
- ▶ The global nuclear threats that are staring us in the face today—catastrophic terrorism; a rise in the number of nuclear weapon states; and the danger of mistaken, accidental, or unauthorized nuclear launch—can only be successfully prevented by cooperation between Washington, Brussels, and Moscow.
- ▶ Given NATO political and security priorities in the post-Soviet era and serious new threats to global security, the rationale for maintaining thousands of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe for another decade is out of date and dangerous for NATO and for Russia.
 - ▶ Today, tactical nuclear weapons in the Euro-Atlantic region are more of a security risk than asset to NATO. The same is true for Russia.
 - ▶ NATO's serious conventional capability gaps and resource constraints for likely contingencies (as seen in Libya) also lead to the blunt reality that, over the long-term, NATO cannot sustain a program that spends scarce defense resources on tactical nuclear weapons capabilities that are no longer militarily useful.
- ▶ Moving to a new nuclear posture in Europe will require increasing trust between NATO and Russia, as well as corresponding actions by both.
 - ▶ One approach to framing a new process and dialogue on European security is to start discussions on a broad range of issues through the prism of steps designed to increase “warning and decision time” for political and military leaders—so that no nation fears a short warning conventional attack or feels the need to deter or defend against such an attack with tactical nuclear weapons.
 - ▶ Such a dialogue could lead to progress on conventional and nuclear arms, both tactical and strategic, as well as missile defense.
 - ▶ Within this conceptual framework, NATO should state that it now believes the fundamental purpose of its nuclear weapons is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others and plan for further reductions and consolidation of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.
 - ▶ The target of completing consolidation to the United States should be within five years, with the final timing and pace determined by broad political and security developments between NATO and Russia, including but not limited to their tactical nuclear deployments near NATO's border.
 - ▶ This can be accomplished in ways that ensure that NATO will remain a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist; and that America's extended nuclear deterrent will continue, but in a form that is safer and more credible.
 - ▶ The alternative—maintaining the nuclear status quo in Europe—runs a high cost and unacceptable risk.

release authority from Washington would be slow and that the thousands of tactical nuclear weapons on NATO's front line would either have to be used or moved back rapidly—before being overrun. I concluded that the President of the United States would have been confronted within hours with a request to use tactical nuclear weapons, with the horror of strategic nuclear escalation looming just over the horizon.

- b) This early nuclear first use strategy may have served to frighten and deter our adversaries, but it was a very high-risk and dangerous policy for NATO, for all of Europe, and indeed for the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. It left both Alliances reliant on a strategy of destroying the territory they were sworn to defend if conflict occurred.
- c) The lack of conventional warning and decision time inherent in NATO's early first use strategy to my mind made war—indeed nuclear war—more likely, whether by intent or accident. And as could be expected, the Soviets responded over time with the deployment of thousands of their own tactical nuclear weapons, many of which remain forward deployed near NATO's borders today.

Another disturbing fact that was very clear during my 1974 trip: the tactical nuclear weapons themselves often were not well secured. While touring a NATO base that stored some of the weapons, I had been assured by commanding officers that the weapons were secure. As I shook hands with a sergeant on the way out, I felt a piece of paper crumbled in my hand. It said, "This is all a bunch of bull, Senator. If you want the real story see me and my buddies at the barracks after you get through with your tour, but don't bring any officers."

Late that afternoon, Frank Sullivan—an experienced member of the Senate Armed Services Committee staff—and I had an alarming conversation with several of the sergeants in charge of the tactical nuclear weapons at that base. We were told that we did not have good security on site, or credible plans to respond to a terrorist attack in the first few hours. The security forces also had drug and alcohol problems with considerable strain between enlisted personnel and officers—a carryover from Vietnam. The base was in a remote enough area that a terrorist group of five to 10 people could have threatened the whole base, an event that would have posed a serious threat to NATO's fragile political consensus. This was also during the era of the Baader-Meinhof gang, who were conducting regular attacks on Germans and U.S. military personnel and facilities. I was so concerned that when I returned to Washington, I went directly to then Defense Secretary Jim Schlesinger and laid out to him my concerns. To his great credit, Jim took action to strengthen security at these facilities.

Those were extremely dangerous times, when the greatest danger of the Cold War—that the Soviet Union would risk a war in Europe—were addressed primarily by confronting Moscow with the threat of early first use of U.S. nuclear weapons backed by our strategic nuclear arsenal. By the grace of God, deterrence did work, but the risk of a European or even global nuclear holocaust was very

real—and at crucial times, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, we were very lucky to have avoided what President Kennedy referred to as “the final failure.”

Although relationships in the Euro-Atlantic region have dramatically improved and European military forces, including tactical nuclear weapons, significantly drawn down on both sides, many of these challenges and lessons remain relevant today—and they will be unfortunately even more relevant in the years ahead unless addressed now. NATO and Russia have a window of opportunity to move decisively and permanently away from this world of peril to a Europe of promise if we apply a sense of history, common sense, and a cooperative approach to today’s obstacles and opportunities.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union 20 years ago, no geopolitical space has undergone as dramatic a transformation as that between the Atlantic and the Urals. During the Cold War, a devastating conventional and nuclear war in Europe was a very real possibility; today, Europe does not face this type of deliberate existential threat. Instead, the global nuclear threats that are staring us in the face today—catastrophic terrorism, a rise in the number of nuclear weapons states, and the danger of mistaken, accidental, or unauthorized nuclear launch—can only be prevented in *cooperation* between Washington, Brussels, and Moscow. The need for cooperation is clear: the United States and Russia still possess thousands of nuclear weapons each—more than 90 percent of the world’s nuclear inventory—and many of these nuclear arms remain deployed or designed for use within the Euro-Atlantic region. Those include small tactical nuclear weapons—a terrorist’s dream—deployed in numerous states throughout the Euro-Atlantic zone.

The reduction and elimination of this Cold War nuclear infrastructure and the reorientation of security policies to address today’s threats is the largest piece of unfinished business from a bygone era and should be moved to the policy front burner for the United States, NATO, and Russia. If we do not address this issue with urgency, we may wake up one day to a 1972 Munich-Olympics scenario, with a masked terrorist waving a gun outside of a nuclear warhead bunker somewhere in Europe. This time the hostages could be millions of people living close by. I believe that we are in a race between cooperation and catastrophe. Both leaders and citizens from around the world must reflect on what is at stake. On the European nuclear front, if we learn from history, we will recognize that nuclear dangers are not likely to be successfully addressed without considering conventional force deployments and perceptions of warning and decision time for all European and Russian leaders.

LISBON’S UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

At last November’s NATO Summit, a compromise was reached in the new NATO Strategic Concept on the role of nuclear weapons in NATO security policy. Specifically, the Strategic Concept embraces two core principles: first, NATO

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is committed to the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons; and second, for as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance.

Although the above formula was perhaps the best Alliance consensus available at that time, it nevertheless papered over a lingering dispute between Allies on the future direction of NATO nuclear policy, stemming from a diverse spectrum of views within NATO regarding the appropriate response to existing and future threats. With respect to the first principle, the Strategic Concept states that NATO will seek to create the conditions for further nuclear reductions. There is nothing, however, approaching a blueprint for achieving this objective, other than a statement that in any future reductions, NATO’s 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. The second principle leaves unanswered the central question of what it means for NATO to remain a “nuclear Alliance” as well as the “appropriate mix” of nuclear and conventional capabilities necessary for deterrence.

Recognizing that more work needed to be done, NATO tasked a review of its nuclear posture as part of a broader Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) at Lisbon. That review is now underway; however, it is far from certain that the DDPR will result in clear answers to core issues relating to NATO nuclear policy or provide clear objectives and a strategy for action. Indeed, there is even talk about the DDPR leading to an “interim report” at next year’s NATO summit—meaning that three years after work on a new Strategic Concept formally began in July 2009, NATO would return to the starting gate in order to maintain the unity of the Alliance.

Of course, NATO should strive for unity on core issues, and the role of nuclear weapons in Alliance security policy and NATO’s role in reducing global nuclear dangers is a core issue; however, unity must not be achieved at the expense of a candid and open review of existing dangers and a real dialogue within NATO and between NATO and Russia. NATO members should also review what, if any, of the roles once envisioned for the Alliance’s tactical nuclear weapons remain realistic today, given the dramatic changes that the continent has undergone since the end of the Cold War. Should the DDPR produce next year a “least common denominator” approach to NATO nuclear policy that simply reaffirms the uneasy consensus achieved last year at Lisbon, NATO risks foregoing a historic opportunity to make a unique and vital contribution to nuclear threat reduction for all of Europe.

RUSSIA AND THE BROADER STRATEGIC CANVAS

NATO nuclear policy issues do not exist in a security or political vacuum. Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the core question remains: does NATO want Russia to be inside or outside the Euro-Atlantic security arc—and,

does Russia itself want to be inside or outside? If inside, are NATO and Russia prepared to develop the means and the will to cooperate, so as to enhance cooperative decision making and cooperative security within the Euro-Atlantic region?

In the absence of a clear answer, Russia's erosion of conventional military capability, distrust of NATO enlargement, and concerns as to its other borders has led it to increase dependency on nuclear weapons—including retaining tactical nuclear weapons greatly in excess of those deployed by the United States in Europe. Not surprisingly, many NATO nations see Russian tactical nuclear weapons as a threat directed primarily, if not exclusively, at them, and insist on Russian "reciprocity" as the price for any further changes to NATO's nuclear posture. Steps taken by NATO to "reassure" allies can look suspicious if not threatening when viewed from Moscow—especially by military professionals who believe their job is to assume the worst case. In the eyes of Russian leaders, these weapons also play a critical role as an equalizer for the weakness of the nation's conventional forces vis-à-vis China—though this perspective is often absent from Moscow's public dialogue.

This is a difficult web to untangle, but we must begin. Objectively, the common interests of the United States, Europe, and Russia are more aligned today than at any point in modern history. Building on recent progress in resetting U.S./NATO-Russian relations and reducing nuclear misunderstandings and dangers in the New START agreement, the window of opportunity is now open for a dynamic political and security dialogue on nuclear weapons and the broader opportunity for increased Euro-Atlantic security.

Fundamentally, however, that dialogue is complicated by a lingering mistrust. This lack of trust is compounded by an extremely difficult menu of security issues: missile defense, conventional forces in Europe, and thousands of tactical nuclear weapons are all vital, complex, and related topics at the core of building a peaceful and secure Euro-Atlantic community.

Russia, NATO, and the United States cannot seize this historic opportunity if solutions are required to every issue before we can move forward on any issue, or if we adopt inflexible formulas built on rigid linkages that have the effect of locking us into a prolonged status quo. A treaty-based approach should not be ruled out, but to make it the priority is likely to bog down these issues for years if not decades.

A POLICY FRAME FOR EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY: INCREASING WARNING AND DECISION TIME

During the 1980s, a "four basket" political and security agenda was used to shape discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union. In pursuing these four baskets, both sides decided to forego "linkage" among them, so that lack of progress on one at any given time would not mean the sacrifice of all others.

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Avoiding rigid and ultimately unworkable linkages was key to moving forward. I suggest the same concept and approach is needed now.

In the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative (EASI) I co-chair with former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and former German Deputy Foreign Minister Wolfgang Ischinger, we—along with a distinguished group of commissioners representing 13 European nations, including Russia—are working to lay the intellectual foundation for an inclusive Euro-Atlantic security system. Unfortunately, generations of leaders have been riding the tide of confrontation for so long they have a hard time matching the rhetoric of partnership with dialogue and practical steps that will build trust and make cooperation a reality—this despite two decades of bilateral and multilateral discussions.

The reasons for this failure are rooted in NATO’s and Russia’s collective inability to address the fundamental question of Russia’s status in a region once dominated by two opposing alliances. The EASI job then is to help our leaders find paths forward toward building a Euro-Atlantic security system that can turn words into deeds, plans into actions, and intentions into meaningful risk reduction. This will ultimately determine whether we—and generations to come—live in a world of promise or a world of peril.

Where to Begin: Dialogue

Unfortunately today, there is still a divide on how each side perceives the other—fed by worst-case assumptions that look at capabilities and operational doctrines, not intentions. I suggest we begin to bridge this divide through a politically mandated process and dialogue among military leaders. For this military dialogue to be successful and sustainable, it will require a mandate set at the presidential level in Washington, Moscow and in Europe. Within this construct, all sides could confront their fears and distrusts. This would require dealing with perceptions, capabilities, doctrines, and intentions—the only way we can begin to build trust, stability, and confidence. This too would create the essential positive dynamic required for discussions between the United States, NATO, and Russia and further boost what must be a continuing effort in the years ahead to begin and then deepen cooperation.

The Concept of Increasing Warning and Decision Time

One approach to framing a new and dynamic dialogue on European security so that Americans, Europeans and Russians can find common ground is to discuss a range of security issues through the prism of steps that could increase “warning and decision time” for political and military leaders. If no nation fears a short warning conventional attack or feels the need to deter or defend against such an attack with tactical nuclear weapons, the chances of war—including nuclear war—by accident, miscalculation, or false warning could be significantly reduced.

As Igor Ivanov, Wolfgang Ischinger, and I recently wrote: “Pursuing arrangements that increase warning and decision-making time for all countries in the Euro-Atlantic region would introduce stability into the NATO-Russia relationship” and “would constitute a giant step toward ending the relationship’s militarized framework.”¹

Rather than construct a process of engagement with an explicit goal of producing a new arrangement, agreement, or treaty, the objective would be to initiate a dynamic process that would inform governments and lead to considered judgments on next steps. Leaders will need to discuss where best to initiate this new dialogue; it could begin in an existing forum involving all nations in the Euro-Atlantic region and then proceed in both concept and practice in other venues. For example, some issues relating to warning and decision time may be bilateral; others, multilateral; and others, applicable throughout Europe.

Although the issues of conventional and nuclear arms and missile defense are clearly related in European security, progress can be made separately, as long as the parties believe there is a serious dialogue underway to understand and deal with different threat perceptions. In fact, practical progress in one area will help to catalyze progress in others. It is here where the concept of increasing warning and decision time—applied to conventional and nuclear arms, both tactical and strategic, as well as missile defense—could facilitate progress on a broad range of issues, without rigid linkages.

Missile Defense

Developing a cooperative approach to missile defense is the prime case in point. For the United States, NATO, and Russia, the stakes associated with missile defense have never been higher, following the agreement reached at Lisbon in the NATO-Russia Council to pursue missile defense cooperation. The next year—coincident with the timing of the DDPR and the next NATO summit in the United States—is crucial. If progress can be made in developing a joint approach to missile defense cooperation (the subject of an EASI Working Group chaired by former U.S. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, former Director of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service Vyacheslav Trubnikov, and former German Federal Minister of Defense Volker Rühle)—it will surely create a positive dynamic for progress on broader nuclear issues and efforts to advance conventional arms control.

The concept of increasing warning and decision time applied to missile defense is not difficult to grasp. For example, pooling and sharing data and information from early warning radars and satellites in Cooperation Centers staffed by U.S., NATO, and Russian officers working together would increase warning and

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1. Sam Nunn, Igor Ivanov, and Wolfgang Ischinger, “A Post-Nuclear Euro-Atlantic Security Order,” Project Syndicate, December 14, 2010, <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=42222>.

decision time by providing an enhanced threat picture and notification of missile attack. Missile defenses would also strengthen defense against conventional and nuclear missile threats, which would bolster deterrence and increase decision time for national leaders.

As my EASI Co-Chair Wolfgang Ischinger recently wrote, the realization of a cooperative approach to missile defense involving NATO and Russia “would signal a decisive change in the relationship between the West and Russia . . . cooperation in this sensitive area would make it clear that the suspicion and mistrust that has traditionally characterized this relationship is finally to be buried . . . the establishment of a joint missile defense system offers an opportunity to take West-East relationships to a whole new level.”²

Conventional Forces

Similarly, in the wake of the impasse in bringing the Adapted Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty into force and Russia’s suspension of its obligations under the existing CFE Treaty, finding a way forward that supports the interests of all states and enhances transparency, predictability, and stability would be a crucial step forward in reinforcing the independence of states in the Euro-Atlantic region, “reassuring” NATO allies, and building stronger relations with Russia.

Indeed, it is the conventional piece of the European security puzzle—the perception of relative weakness in conventional forces—that has provided the rationale for tactical nuclear weapons deployments in Europe, both historically and today. When I first became involved in these issues in 1962, the United States and NATO believed they were outgunned by Soviet tank divisions in East Germany, and thousands of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons were deployed in Europe; when the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact collapsed and the Red Army returned home, the United States almost immediately withdrew the vast majority of its tactical nuclear stockpile back to the United States. The Russians also made significant reductions. This helped but did not solve the problem.

Today, NATO proclaims it does not consider any country to be its adversary and that NATO poses no threat to Russia. Russia, however, looks at NATO’s conventional capabilities relative to its own, and when combined with NATO’s geographic advance, perceives a prospective threat to its security—and the need to maintain tactical nuclear weapons as a counterbalance. And although the Russian conventional force deployments clearly do not present a near-term threat to Western Europe, there are some NATO members bordering Russia who fear Moscow could deliver a substantial blow, as they did in Georgia in 2008, and who see Russian tactical nuclear weapons deployments as threatening.

2. Wolfgang Ischinger, “Monthly Mind June 2011—A Security Roof Over Europe?” Munich Security Conference, June 22, 2011, <http://www.securityconference.de/Top-News-Detail.55+M5da94ab113e.o.html?L=1>.

Here again, a NATO-Russia sustained and dynamic dialogue centered on increasing warning and decision time could pave the way for progress. For example, nations could discuss measures relating to transparency on force deployments; limits on exercises, particularly near the Russia-NATO border; constraints on reinforcements and maneuvers in sensitive areas, such as the former CFE flank regions; and understandings on the kinds of armaments that could be deployed forward. The result could lead to a series of steps, informal and formal, that cumulatively would increase warning and decision time, reduce fears of a conventional attack, and address some of our current difficulties relating to CFE. The CFE Treaty is near breakdown and must be repaired or replaced with a new dynamic concept and process that deals with both Russian and European perceptions and fears.

Tactical Nuclear Weapons

There can be no higher priority than reducing nuclear dangers that are common throughout the Euro-Atlantic security space—specifically tactical nuclear weapons now deployed by Russia and NATO. Dialogue centered broadly on warning and decision time that lead to joint action on missile defense and conventional forces could also jumpstart what has been a frozen discourse on tactical nuclear weapons. If nations in the Euro-Atlantic region perceive a reduced threat from conventional attack and an increased ability to defend against ballistic missiles, tactical nuclear weapons become less relevant to European security. The United States, NATO, and Russia should therefore be working now to define a shared approach to nuclear threat reduction, one that can be implemented within this broad framework.

A COSTLY STATUS QUO

Today, NATO's tactical nuclear force posture, according to published reports, consists of approximately 150–250 air-delivered nuclear weapons—gravity bombs—deliverable by NATO aircraft at a handful of storage sites in Europe.³ NATO dual capable aircraft (DCA) are reaching the end of their original service lives. It is therefore inevitable that the question of modernization of capabilities—including costs—will arise in the next few years, and that countries that propose to retain DCA and nuclear weapons on their soil will have to explain the rationale for doing so to their parliaments and publics.

Then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates underscored NATO's resource quandary in his June 10, 2011, speech in Brussels, where he noted that for all but a

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3. Malcolm Chalmers, *Occasional Paper, March 2010: NATO's Tactical Nuclear Dilemma*, (Washington, DC: Royal United Services Institute, March 2010), 1–2.

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handful of allies, defense budgets have been chronically starved for adequate funding, in an environment where total European defense spending has declined by nearly 15 percent during the past decade. Furthermore, rising personnel costs combined with the demands of training and equipping for Afghan deployments has consumed a large share of defense budgets—with the result that investment accounts for future modernization and other capabilities not directly related to Afghanistan are being squeezed out—as we saw in Libya. In the Secretary’s words, “Regrettably, but realistically, this situation is highly unlikely to change. The relevant challenge for us today, therefore, is no longer the total level of defense spending by allies, but how these limited (and dwindling) resources are allocated and for what priorities.”⁴ Thus, resource constraints are likely to make it even more difficult for NATO to sustain its existing nuclear posture.

Taken in isolation, the imperative for achieving parliamentary and public approval of NATO modernized nuclear deployments including delivery systems will be difficult, but may be achievable. NATO governments have sustained these deployments for decades. But prospective cuts in NATO defense spending—and the inherent opportunity costs when measured against other defense priorities as NATO looks to adapt its security policies to meet new threats—are making it increasingly problematic to maintain all the fleets of DCA on which tactical nuclear weapons deployment now depends, unless they are deemed essential for NATO security. Are they?

On this point, there is scant support for the military utility of these weapons—no matter what the contingency. As then-Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General James E. Cartwright said at an April 8, 2010, briefing in Washington, U.S. tactical nuclear bombs in Europe do not serve a military function not already addressed by U.S. strategic and conventional forces.⁵ Moreover, the extremely demanding scenario for conducting a nuclear strike mission (detailed in a recent essay by Dr. Karl-Heinz Kamp and Major General Robertus C.N. Remkes, USAF, Ret.)—where any attempt to employ these weapons will be “fraught with many challenges” (a mission of “seven consecutive miracles”) and complicated by the visibility of the many actions required to prepare the aircraft, weapon, and crews for such an attack—further undercuts their plausible use.⁶ If U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe have virtually no military utility, it is hard to argue they have any appreciable value as a real deterrent.

4. Robert M. Gates, “The Security and Defense Agenda (Future of NATO),” Brussels, Belgium, June 10, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581>.

5. Council on Foreign Relations Meeting, April 8, 2010, http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/council_on_foreign_relation.pdf.

6. See Chapter 4 by Karl-Heinz Kamp and Robertus C.N. Remkes, “Options for NATO Nuclear Sharing Arrangements.”

The bottom line: in an age of tight budgets and competing defense priorities where the threat of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism are the greatest threats to NATO security, maintaining the nuclear status quo in Europe runs a high cost and high risk. The key question that NATO should be addressing: what are the real alternatives to providing genuine “reassurance” to allies, given that the military credibility of tactical nuclear weapons has eroded and they are increasingly degraded as a political symbol of Alliance resolve?

A RISKY STATUS QUO

Beyond parliaments, publics, and costs, the most important argument against maintaining the nuclear status quo within NATO is security. No matter what degree NATO assesses the risk of a terrorist attack against a European NATO nuclear base—and I am convinced there is a significant risk—the political and security consequences of such an attack would shake the Alliance, even if the attack failed. The security of tactical nuclear weapons should therefore be of paramount importance for NATO’s current nuclear posture, and also a guiding principle for future change. This point also applies to Russian tactical nuclear weapons, including those deployed in the Euro-Atlantic region. NATO and Russia clearly have a mutual stake when it comes to terrorism and nuclear security. Even—or especially if—no progress is made in changing NATO and Russian tactical nuclear deployments, independent security improvements by both NATO and Russia are essential. If we lose focus on this, NATO and Russia may wake up one morning to a terrorist using one of our own nuclear weapons against us—just as al Qaeda used our own airplanes to attack us on September 11, 2001. Both sides are long overdue for a risk-benefit analysis, keeping in mind that nuclear terrorism would have catastrophic consequences.

NATO’S HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD IN TRANSFORMING NUCLEAR SECURITY

The DDPR provides an opportunity to forge an Alliance consensus on NATO tactical nuclear weapons, including the appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities necessary for deterrence, as well as alternatives to U.S. tactical nuclear weapons now deployed in Europe as part of that mix.

Russia too must rethink its nuclear policies and posture and forge a new consensus of its own with respect to Euro-Atlantic security. Leadership by the United States and NATO is essential; but without parallel leadership from Moscow, progress on key security issues—including tactical nuclear weapons, missile defense, and conventional forces—will grind to a halt.

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Both NATO and Russia have a strong incentive to escape Cold War-era paradigms—including the perception of conventional force imbalances on one side that perpetuate dangerous nuclear deployments on the other. The elephant in the room for Russia is NATO’s force deployments near Russian borders. The elephant in the room for a number of NATO countries are Russian forces near NATO’s borders.

There is no escaping this dynamic without a serious and sustained dialogue—at both the military and political level—between the United States, NATO, and Russia. In the absence of such a dialogue and a continuing process of engagement, it is difficult to see how we can eliminate the military option as a conceivable tool for resolving conflicts in the Euro-Atlantic region.

Policy Context for NATO

The policy context for proceeding on a new path should be clearly understood and publicly stated next spring. Indeed, the power of the case for changing NATO nuclear policy rests in its inexorable logic.

The original purpose of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons now deployed in Europe—to deter the massing of Soviet tanks and the threat of an invasion of Western Europe—no longer exists. Today, NATO faces a menagerie of threats—none of which, including those with a possible nuclear component, require the continuing deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe to deter or defend against.

Given NATO’s serious conventional capability gaps and resource constraints for likely contingencies, the blunt reality is that NATO cannot sustain over the long term continued commitment of valuable defense resources on tactical nuclear weapons capabilities that are no longer militarily useful. Indeed, to persist in maintaining U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe for another decade—in the absence of any real military or political utility—is more of a security risk than asset to NATO, given the nontrivial risk of a terrorist attack against a NATO base with nuclear weapons. The same is also true for Russia.

This provides a strong argument for a dynamic process leading to parallel steps rather than a treaty-centered approach. Such a process is more likely to lead to joint actions that preclude—rather than are preceded by—a disaster. Consultations on definitions, the implementation of data exchanges and confidence building measures, and more inclusive NATO-Russia threat assessments could all take place within this framework and would help narrow the gap between Russian and Western security perceptions.

Even with substantial changes in NATO nuclear policy and the elimination of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance. America’s extended nuclear deterrent will persist as a core element of NATO’s overall strategy, but in a form that is safer and more credible.

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Policy Elements for NATO: “10 for 2012”

Questions related to sharing nuclear risks and responsibilities, assuring allies, and defining a strategy for engaging Russia are central. NATO should come to a consensus position on these points in order to provide the necessary guidance coming out of the DDPR in time for next spring’s NATO summit. **Within this context, I suggest that NATO consider the following 10 commitments for the 2012 NATO summit to be held in Chicago in May:**

1. To deepen consultations and dialogue with Russia on the full range of Euro-Atlantic security issues—missile defense and conventional and nuclear arms—including on steps to increase warning and decision time for political and military leaders so that no nation fears a short warning conventional attack or perceives the need to deter or defend against such an attack with tactical nuclear weapons. Progress on these issues can be made separately, as long as all issues are being addressed in parallel and within a common framework. Military to military discussions are essential.
2. To affirm that the security of U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Europe should be and must remain the highest priority for NATO and a guiding principle for further changes to that posture.
3. To seek mutual reductions of tactical nuclear weapons, beginning with enhanced transparency and security for U.S. and Russian tactical nuclear weapons. NATO and Russian political leaders should jointly state that as long as U.S. tactical nuclear weapons remain deployed in Europe, all of NATO has a stake in their security; all of NATO also has a stake in the security of Russian tactical nuclear arms; and Russia has an equal stake in the security of NATO weapons as well as their own. Reciprocal steps to improve the security of tactical nuclear weapons now should be a priority, and could include a joint threat and security assessment, a combined recovery exercise, site visits to nuclear storage sites, a shared commitment to separate nuclear weapons from operational units, and data exchanges.
4. To affirm that Russian reciprocity will be measured broadly, taking into account the full range of political and security issues relating to Euro-Atlantic security. This approach will allow the United States and NATO to take meaningful steps in nuclear risk reduction, mindful of the interrelationships with Russia but not rigidly linked.
5. To continue to adjust the appropriate mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities necessary for deterrence and defense against 21st century threats so as to strengthen common defense and deterrence and enhance nuclear security and threat reduction.
6. To proceed with further reductions of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, with the announced target of completing the consolidation of U.S. tactical

nuclear weapons to the United States within five years, with the final timing and pace to be determined by broad political and security developments between NATO and Russia, including but not limited to their tactical nuclear posture.

7. To strengthen extended deterrence and reassurance of European Allies. NATO will seek to adapt existing arrangements relating to nuclear sharing and consultations within NATO, so that NATO will have a safer and more credible extended nuclear deterrent and remain a nuclear Alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist. As stated in the Strategic Concept, “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.”⁷
8. To move to adopt a diverse and robust set of reassurance measures—beyond those relating to adapting existing arrangements for nuclear sharing—that will tangibly enhance confidence in NATO’s capabilities to defend against existing and emerging threats both conventional and nuclear; and institute a process for periodic review and adoption of new measures. Such measures will be more effective if implemented in the context of building a more inclusive Euro-Atlantic security community, including improving NATO-Russia relations.
9. To state that NATO now believes the fundamental purpose of its nuclear weapons is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others, further underscoring NATO’s commitment to lead in transforming nuclear security.
10. To consult with countries in the Asia-Pacific region as it implements this approach.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 60 years in Europe, thousands of men and women thought deeply and worked diligently to prevent nuclear war. We were good, we were diligent, but we were also very lucky. We had more than a few close calls, including mistakes by both sides that did not turn into fatal errors of judgment.

The Cold War is now 20 years behind us, yet NATO and Russia continue to live with Cold War-era nuclear deployments in Europe and unnecessary and unwise nuclear risks. Today, there is a compelling rationale for transforming NATO nuclear policies.

7. NATO, “Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation,” November 2010, para. 18, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68580.htm.

The NATO DDPR process can and must provide the necessary analytic foundation for changing the nuclear status quo. It will not, however, be sufficient by itself. NATO nuclear policy—in particular, changes to the status quo—will require engaging political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic—and substantial dialogue with Russia. Allied perceptions regarding threats and responses will never completely overlap in an alliance with 28 member states; but this cannot be permitted to drive the Alliance to a least common denominator approach to addressing today's nuclear threats.

The rationale for maintaining U.S. and Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Europe for another decade is dangerously out of date, for both countries and for Europe. The case for change is compelling; the time for change is now; and NATO, with Russia, must lead the way.

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REDUCING NUCLEAR RISKS IN EUROPE: A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The essay by U.S. Senator Sam Nunn is included in a new NTI report, *Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe: A Framework for Action* (NTI, 2011). The full report is available at www.nti.org/natoreport. The papers and essays included in the report are listed below.

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A Russian Perspective on the Challenge of U.S., NATO, and Russian Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons

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ABOUT NTI

The Nuclear Threat Initiative is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with a mission to strengthen global security by reducing the risk of use and preventing the spread of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Founded in 2001 by former Senator Sam Nunn and entrepreneur Ted Turner, NTI is guided by a prestigious, international board of directors.

NTI is focused on closing the gap between global threats from nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and the global response to those threats. Recognizing that governments have most of the resources and authority in the large-scale work of threat reduction, NTI emphasizes leverage. It's not just what NTI can do throughout the world. It's what we can persuade others to do. We use our voice to raise awareness and advocate solutions, undertake direct action projects that demonstrate new ways to reduce threats, and foster new thinking about these problems.



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ABOUT THE FULL REPORT:

Reducing Nuclear Risks In Europe

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

This report is designed to help develop an approach to reduce nuclear risks in Europe and contribute to NATO's Deterrence and Defense Posture Review. The collection of papers identifies policy and force structure options open to NATO members and aims to promote dialogue and new thinking on several key issues and questions, both within NATO and with Russia.

The authors include leading international military, academic, and policy experts who have advised senior government officials in the United States, Russia, and Europe. Edited by NTI's Steve Andreasen and Isabelle Williams, the volume also includes a featured essay by NTI Co-Chairman and CEO, former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, who provides a comprehensive perspective on NATO's next steps and European security, formed by his 40-year career addressing these issues.



Nuclear Threat Initiative, 1747 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Seventh Floor, Washington, DC 20006 www.nti.org

“Five years ago, I joined with Bill Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn to endorse setting the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and working energetically on the actions required to achieve that goal. A crucial step in that process must be eliminating short-range nuclear weapons designed to be forward deployed.”

These smaller and more portable nuclear weapons are, given their characteristics, inviting acquisition targets for terrorist groups.

In this volume, *Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe: A Framework for Action*, Sam Nunn and a distinguished group of international experts provide a compelling blueprint—within NATO and with Russia—for enhancing the security of these weapons and laying the groundwork for their eventual elimination.

As Sam says at the conclusion of his trenchant personal essay, “The rationale for maintaining U.S. and Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Europe for another decade is dangerously out of date, for both countries and for Europe. The case for change is compelling; the time for change is now; and NATO, with Russia, must lead the way.”

We need to jack up our resolve, use our best brains and creativity, and get moving on this problem now—so we can win the race between cooperation and catastrophe.

—**GEORGE P. SHULTZ**
U.S. Secretary of State, 1982–1989
Thomas W. and Susan B. Ford Distinguished Fellow
Hoover Institution