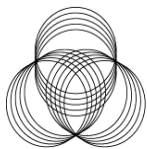


# NATO'S DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE POSTURE REVIEW AND THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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## SYNTHESIS

OF A ROUNDTABLE JOINTLY ORGANIZED BY THE ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION (ACA),  
THE BRITISH AMERICAN SECURITY INFORMATION COUNCIL (BASIC), THE INSTITUTE FOR  
PEACE RESEARCH AND SECURITY POLICY HAMBURG (IFSH) AND THE INSTITUT DE  
RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES ET STRATÉGIQUES (IRIS),  
WITH SUPPORT OF THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION



**IFSH**

Institute for Peace Research  
and Security Policy  
at the University of Hamburg



**BASIC**

British American Security  
Information Council

**ACA**

Arms Control Association

This document is a synthesis of views expressed at the roundtable and is not intended to be an endorsement of views by any of the sponsoring organizations.

In France, deterrence and nuclear weapons are not a hot topic; and yet, this is a major strategic challenge. The 2010 NATO Strategic Concept addressed the nuclear issue but the Lisbon Summit did not clarify the role of nuclear weapons in the NATO defence posture. It set off a deterrence and defence posture review to specify their role as well as their linkage with missile defence and conventional weapons. The text of the review will be endorsed in Chicago in May 2012, but this will not resolve all disagreements.

### **The changing role of nuclear weapons in European security**

U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Europe embody the transatlantic link. However, according to experts, nuclear weapons will play a decreasing role in ensuring this link between European and American allies in the future, and there are likely to be other means of ensuring Alliance cohesion. Despite the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons outlined in a major speech by U.S. President Barack Obama in Prague, there is still a strong attachment to the idea that nuclear deterrence and specifically U.S. weapons in Europe continue to play a role in peace and stability in Europe. NATO member states generally fall into one of three categories:

- Nuclear-weapon states;
- states that support the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons on European soil; and
- anti-nuclear states.

Nuclear weapons are generally perceived by NATO member states as an *ultimate guarantee* and *security insurance*, especially in the following cases:

- If Iran becomes a nuclear state;
- a crisis with Russia;
- a strategic surprise.

But the role of nuclear weapons as a deterrent is controversial and highly specific, and has little or no relevance to terrorist threats, conventional attacks or most other security threats.

Nuclear weapons are still perceived by most analysts in France as the *ultimate guarantee* to protect the state's vital interests. Obama's Prague speech and related developments have called into question the future of nuclear deterrence, and in particular the association between prestige and possession of nuclear weapons. France finds itself at an impasse with many of its allies because it wants to keep its nuclear independence, and dreads the decline of nuclear power in the context of disarmament. If it is to avoid isolation it will need to consider evolution in its doctrine, in order to go beyond the *pensée unique*.

Meanwhile, Germany has explicitly and publicly renewed its commitment towards nuclear disarmament. Whilst nuclear matters are hardly the critical electoral debate, the public across the political spectrum is hostile to nuclear weapons stationed in Europe, and the next legislative elections in September 2013 could impact the German approach on this topic.

The British approach is ambiguous: the United Kingdom is committed in principle to nuclear disarmament, and yet, nuclear weapons are seen as ensuring the credibility and the influence of the country on the international stage. Its growing nuclear relationship with France could impact on the positions of both countries.

One conference participant observed that when a state has a strong conventional military and other capabilities, such as the United States, nuclear deterrence can seem cumbersome and

irritating; whereas when a state is small but independent, such as France, deterrence is seen as an important asset.

### **Strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces: their changing contribution to deterrence and reassurance**

According to NATO representatives, NATO is already thinking beyond the last strategic concept, due to:

- Changing structural factors: uncertainties with regards to NATO's enlargement, NATO's partnerships, wind-down of operations with the transition in Afghanistan, cuts to Allies' defence budgets, with a growing imbalance between the United States and other NATO members; and
- contextual factors: the economic crisis, the challenge of Iran, Arab Spring, rise of Asia, and growing competition for energy and mines.

New initiatives as *Smart Defence*, *NATO FORCE 2020* and *Connected Forces Initiatives* are said to reflect a new strategic thinking within NATO, but some elements of these contrast with the attachment to existing deployments, such as the forward-deployed free-fall nuclear bombs in Europe.

NATO's deterrence and defence posture includes three complementary components: nuclear forces, missile defence and conventional forces. But these three components do not involve the same level and nature of cooperation between Europe and the United States. In the view of some at the seminar, nuclear forces are buried deep within NATO's DNA, and are seen by many as a prerequisite to the applicability of Article 5. NATO gathers nuclear and non-nuclear states, and risk-sharing is one of its major features, for a number of reasons. However, the conditions for using nuclear weapons are not clear, and there is resistance in several quarters to giving greater transparency on this through a declaratory policy. This allows for some flexibility within the Alliance, and avoidance of controversial debate, but to an extent harms the Alliance's reputation elsewhere and throws up question-marks around its ability to deploy with unity in a crisis.

### **Missile Defence and NATO: Implications for Deterrence and Reassurance**

NATO's sub-strategic nuclear weapons that are deployed in Europe have both a military and a political purpose: they aim at deterring potential foes and reassuring Allies. The Lisbon Summit Declaration of November 2010 included a decision "to develop a NATO missile defence capability to provide full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces...", and it invited Russian cooperation in this task. The stated target of these systems was "the increasing threats posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles."

For the last 10 years, the United States has invested around \$10 billion a year and has been developing cutting edge technology, aimed at "simple" ballistic threats from newly emerging, nuclear weapons states (i.e. endo-atmospheric ballistic missiles with a range below 3,000km). No stringent operational testing has been done and missile defence's level of effectiveness is not proved. The last successful testing was in 2008. According to some experts, theatre ballistic missile defences are potentially useful against such shorter-range missiles topped with high explosives – to mitigate losses to civilian populations, military forces, and infrastructure – but they do not affect the strategic balance.

The United States missed two chances to negotiate significant cuts in strategic offensive arms – with the Soviet Union at Reykjavik in 1987 and with Russia in the late 1990s during efforts to bring START II into effect. The 2012 electoral campaigns in both the United States and Russia have not created a propitious climate for arms control. But it may yet be possible to work on developing a blueprint for cooperation prior to NATO’s Chicago Summit in May. The more cooperation that can be achieved, the less threatening U.S. missile defences will seem to the Russians.

All NATO states have enormous stakes in the success of U.S.-Russian negotiations to further reduce nuclear weapons stockpiles. U.S. missile defence forces are more likely to be an obstacle rather than an inducement to Russian movement in the desired direction. But there are two reasons for hope: firstly, fiscal pressures on the U.S. defence budget will force Congress away from a Cold War autopilot, creating strong incentives to shift resources away from political programs like strategic missile defence toward those that can increase military capabilities that count in theatre. Secondly, Europe is now a player at the missile defence table. NATO has offered political support and real estate for the Phased Adaptive Approach. Its financial commitment is relatively modest, however. Nevertheless, Europe has a new ability to influence U.S. policy. But European countries need to resist the temptation to use missile defence as leverage.

According to a European participant, European countries do not share the same enthusiasm for missile defence as the U.S. Administration. The Lisbon Summit did not make clear who the enemy was, how efficient the system was and whether NATO’s members have the capacity to develop this program. Furthermore, funding, planning, and technological feasibility are still uncertain. Estimated costs for the C2 element are about €800 million over 14 years. If European countries want to develop their own system, they will have to pay for it – if they can afford it.

It was said by some participants that missile defence is a complement, not a substitute, for nuclear weapons, as it could not provide the same deterrence by punishment capability. However, given that the principal credible justifications for continued deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe are more surrounding assurance and burden sharing than deterrence as such (something that alternative strategic systems or conventional capabilities have a more credible role), this may be controversial. Missile defence is at least as effective as forward-deployment of nuclear bombs for assurance of U.S. commitment to Europe by linking European security to U.S. interests (and boots on the ground), and Europe’s ability to contribute to the burden of providing for military capability through political support and hosting forces. Indeed, given the location of assets, missile defence could be more effective.

The United Kingdom generally aligns itself with the United States on missile defence. On the contrary, France thinks that deterrence is the ‘ultimate’ guarantee of its security and independence, and has felt reluctant to endorse missile defence in the past as a threat to the stability of nuclear deterrence. The French most definitively now see nuclear deterrence and missile defence as two separate but complementary matters. Some other European countries are more supportive of moves away from nuclear deterrence and support missile defence as a means of moving in that direction.

According to one French participant, the United States has always shown strong support for missile defence (except between 1972 and 1983), for two key reasons: the Americans have always valued the vision of achieving 100% security; and they would like to escape the inherent contradictions underlying the threat to use nuclear weapons. As a result, even if the Iranian threat

disappears, the United States is likely to stay on the path of developing its strategic missile defence. After all, the programme predates any focus on Iran.

### **Reviewing NATO's defence and deterrence posture: What should be done and what could be done?**

NATO is the only nuclear-sharing alliance, and has no intention of being the first to disarm. The DDPR (Defence and Deterrence Posture Review) arose from a compromise at the Lisbon Summit, during which nuclear issues were hardly discussed. However, the discussions around the DDPR have thrown up several fault-lines in the Alliance. Three different groups of countries were identified at the seminar:

- Some countries see the DDPR as an opportunity for NATO to clarify its doctrine and its priorities, in accordance with the Lisbon Summit Declaration. The DDPR can shape a consistent NATO's strategy.
- Some countries (specifically Germany and Norway) see DDPR as an opportunity for changing NATO's policy regarding nuclear weapons and disarmament.
- Some countries (specifically France) prefer a status quo and try to prevent NATO from changing, or being over-prescriptive in its transparency over doctrine in a many the restricts its nuclear weapon state members.

DDPR has four components: NATO's three defence components which include conventional forces, nuclear forces, missile defence, and conventional forces, plus disarmament.

- Conventional forces: the economic crisis and budget cuts will impact priorities. Countries will have incentive to use their defence assets smartly (*Smart Defence*) through interoperability and pooling of resources.
- Nuclear forces: the reduction of tactical weapons could be achievable if the United States and Russia are both engaged and mutually commit to disarm.
- Missile defence: the debate over deterrence and missile defence is still on-going, but the commitment to develop an Alliance-wide system is evolving.
- Disarmament: France and Germany strongly disagree on NATO's nuclear role in this area. Whilst France does not reject disarmament, and agreeing on disarmament principles does not mean immediate commitment to specific disarmament but playing a role in arms control and international security, the Cold War autopilot is an on-going concern in many parts of the Alliance.

Whilst there will certainly be a text agreed in Chicago, underlying disagreements will not be overcome. There were three specific challenges identified at the seminar that will generate a major impact on NATO's nuclear debate: Russia, Iran and finances.

France faces a continuing contradiction, in belonging to NATO but wanting to keep a greater strategic independence than its partners. The French return to NATO's military command was supposed to boost European defence and to strengthen France's influence within NATO, but in the view of some in Paris, both have failed. Some expressed the view that France is now at an impasse and must clarify the role it wants to play within NATO. Does it continue its integration, or step back?

## **Next steps in NATO-Russia nuclear arms control**

In 2012, the United States and Russia still possess well over 90% of all 'nuclear' weapons. The "Cold War autopilot" remains a feature of disarmament-related debates and slows down progress towards global nuclear disarmament. A new U.S.-Russia treaty is unlikely in the near future--it is not the right moment. The most likely scenario in the near future, judging by discussions in Washington, would be a unilateral reduction in the U.S. nuclear deployments with a view to rationalisation. Such reductions, however, would be tempered by Washington's desire to maintain credible nuclear reassurances to allies. This would be a breakthrough in nuclear disarmament that would promote confidence and could encourage France and the United Kingdom to move on. But whilst there would be reductions, the withdrawal of U.S. bombs from Europe would mean going beyond the principle of reciprocity in the New Strategic Concept, which limits NATO's room for manoeuvre.

Transparency and confidence building measures around the status and location of stockpiles taken both by the United States and Russia are feasible and necessary steps. Reciprocity is judged a prerequisite by NATO, but there is scepticism amongst many over Russia's willingness to engage. Russia sees its tactical nuclear weapons as a counter-balance to NATO's conventional superiority, and the sheer numbers of Chinese forces to the south-east. As a result, the 2010 Russian Strategic Doctrine stated that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons first to protect the integrity of the Russian state. Russian hostility to the development of missile defence only adds to these complications. For all these reasons, Russia is very unlikely to cooperate and reduce its armament without greater concessions from NATO.

## **NATO and the future of global nuclear arms control and disarmament**

Calls for the removal of all tactical nuclear weapons from combat bases on the European continent are likely to grow, because many see these weapons as having virtually no military utility and incur financial costs and security risks, including terrorist capture, as well as creating political friction between NATO and Russia. However, not everyone believes that disarmament is an end in itself, but is only acceptable if it increases security, at every step of the way. One participant expressing this sentiment stated his belief that the nuclear weapon states should be the one to endorse any declaratory statement, not NATO, because it is the nuclear states that own the weapons, that decide upon their release, and should be the ones to deal with nuclear disarmament. This was not a view shared by many other participants. Nevertheless, the idea of a conference of states with nuclear weapons on establishing a shared perspective on achieving "minimum nuclear deterrence" doctrine received broad support in the meeting. Equally, the development of security strategies that do not depend upon nuclear weapon deployment would be equally important in the views of some. The continuation of the current arrangements are not only seen as deeply unbalanced and unfair by others in the world, but unsustainable in the longer run. Under this view, if NATO refuses to question its role on proliferation, it might undermine its members' security and defence capacity.

## **Conclusions**

New and forward thinking positions on the French approach to nuclear weapons were voiced at the seminar. The long-standing French 'consensus' on nuclear weapons has so far spared the

country a fractious debate that other countries have endured. But equally, there were some that believed this meant the underlying understanding within the French public was limited.

On the one hand, no one absolutely opposes nuclear disarmament. But opinions in the meeting diverged from extreme that deterrence will always remain useful at the residual level, along with the concept of “strict sufficiency” to the idea that nuclear weapons have outlasted any perceived contribution to security and should be abandoned. The French stakeholders all spoke in favour of organised and negotiated multilateral disarmament.

Even whilst it is not vetoing NATO’s involvement, France remains sceptical about missile defence:

- From a strategic point of view, missile defence can reduce the value of deterrence without improving security. Even though missile defence could replace deterrence in case of disarmament, the strategic context is not yet in favour of disarmament.
- The cost of missile defence is prohibitive, compared with the limited security improvement.
- Missile defence is a threat to Russia’s strategic deterrent. The current strategic balance between conventional forces and missile defence cannot improve progress towards U.S.-Russia disarmament. Confidence and security steps are the best that can be achieved.

France is reluctant to involve NATO in nuclear disarmament because France thinks that this issue has to be addressed by nuclear weapon states and that its own nuclear deterrence is independent from NATO. However, as French participants at the seminar indicated, France intends to be flexible during the Chicago Summit and the DDPR should not be source of tension.

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