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The Future of NATO's Nuclear Weapons

When looking at the current and future role of NATO's nuclear weapons we have to keep in mind that NATO is not only a military but also a security alliance. Ever since the Harmel report of 1967, NATO has been committed to a broad approach to security, including arms control, disarmament and other co-operative security tools as necessary complements to military capabilities.

The New Strategic Concept adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 reflects this by combining a commitment to the goal of creating the conditions for a nuclear weapon-free world with the clear message that as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.

These commitments have to be further elaborated in the Deterrence and Defense Posture Review commissioned by the Lisbon Summit, which is due to be adopted by the next NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012. In that Review, and in line with

the Alliance strategy already adopted, NATO should support nuclear disarmament while preserving a credible and effective deterrent. These two commitments are in fact interlinked: On the one hand, NATO policy has to be consistent with the arms control obligations and objectives of its members. As a nuclear alliance which sees the continued need for a nuclear deterrent, NATO also carries a special responsibility for the pursuit of the nuclear disarmament obligation under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. On the other hand, effective arms control, i.e. a working non-proliferation regime as well as progress in disarmament, can positively alter the security considerations underlying NATO's deterrence posture.

NATO's 1999 Strategy already recognized the fundamental changes that had taken place since the end of the Cold War, and stressed that nuclear forces would be kept at the minimum level consistent with the security environment.

Further changes have since taken place. Traditional threats have receded. New threats such as nuclear terrorism and proliferation have emerged. Classic nuclear deterrence is poorly suited to counter those new challenges. At the same time, conventional capabilities as well as new capabilities such as missile defense have evolved. All these developments imply a reduced salience of nuclear weapons in the overall range of NATO capabilities.

The changes in the security environment allow and require changes in NATO's nuclear posture. NATO has to examine whether the size and composition of its nuclear deterrent is still adequate and in line with the strategy of seeking security at the "lowest possible level of forces". This also affects the role of NATO's nuclear forces. The Alliance should align its declaratory policy with the USA and its recent Nuclear Posture Review by clarifying that it does not threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states which are in full compliance with their non-proliferation obligations. A discrepancy on these so-called "negative security assurances" between NATO and the USA as the biggest provider of nuclear forces assigned to NATO would be difficult to conceive.

What consequences does this have for NATO's nuclear forces in Europe?

Nuclear weapons reductions after the end of the Cold War have not only covered the strategic systems held by the USA but have also led to a dramatic reduction in the number of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has reduced the number of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe by

roughly 85%, and even 95% compared to the height of the Cold War.

By stating its intention to work towards withdrawal of the remaining nuclear weapons from Germany, the German Government triggered a debate about the future of NATO's non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe. Given the small remaining numbers, the debate is more about their political value for Alliance cohesion and solidarity than about their real deterrence value.

Because this question concerns NATO as a whole, we made it clear that we will not decide unilaterally but aim at a consensus within the Alliance. We also have to take into account the large Russian arsenal of these weapons, which we want to see reduced and eventually eliminated.

This is reflected in the New Strategic Concept with the commitment to "create the conditions for further reductions" of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe. The Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) should substantiate this by supporting their inclusion in future US-Russian negotiations and offering concrete steps to facilitate such negotiations.

To this end, together with partners such as Poland, Norway and the Netherlands, we proposed to initiate a dialogue with Russia on confidence-building and transparency measures in the NATO-Russia Council. Such measures could pave the way for future reductions to be negotiated by the USA and Russia. We expect that the DDPR will translate this proposal into a joint Alliance position.

In conclusion, my belief is that a NATO consensus on the future of its nuclear capabilities can be built around the understanding that the Alliance

- will retain a strong nuclear deterrent as long as nuclear weapons exist;
- defines the size, composition and role of its nuclear forces as part of an appropriate mix consisting of conventional, nuclear and missile defense capabilities, with shared risks and responsibilities;
- pursues the objective to further reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons in the

overall range of NATO capabilities;

- has a broad understanding of security, combining military capabilities with co-operative security instruments;
- is ready to engage with Russia on a co-operative basis.

I am convinced that with such an understanding coming out of the current Review, NATO can adapt its posture effectively to the security threats of the 21st century.

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