

SIPRI YEARBOOK 2013

Armaments, Disarmament and International Security

NATO and non-strategic nuclear weapons

IAN ANTHONY



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III. NATO and non-strategic nuclear weapons

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At their summit in Chicago, USA, in May 2012, the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) endorsed the outcome of a Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR).¹ Ostensibly mandated by the NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, in November 2010 to examine NATO's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the alliance, in reality the DDPR continued a still unresolved discussion of the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy—and in particular the future approach to US non-strategic nuclear weapons stored in Europe.²

The NATO Strategic Concept adopted in Lisbon tried to reconcile two different perspectives within the alliance. One is the view that, given its conventional armed strength and the benign security environment in Europe, NATO should make significant changes to its nuclear force posture to strengthen the international momentum behind nuclear arms reductions. This is a view often associated with Germany and Norway, for example.³ The second view is that NATO should maintain its nuclear posture without significant changes in order to avoid giving any impression that it is losing its primary focus on effective collective defence, both now and in an uncertain future. This view is often associated with France and with some of the countries in Central Europe, including the Baltic states.⁴

The DDPR elaborated some mechanisms to prepare for future nuclear arms reduction, such as a new consultative forum for NATO members to discuss the possible elements of a future dialogue with Russia on non-strategic nuclear weapons.⁵ However, by finding that 'the Alliance's nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture', NATO signalled that no immediate changes to current policy can be expected.⁶

¹ NATO, 'Deterrence and defence posture review', 20 May 2012, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm>.

² In this context, non-strategic nuclear weapons can be defined as those nuclear weapons not limited by the 2010 Russian–US Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START). New START applies to intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers and the warheads for use on these delivery vehicles. For a summary and other details of New START see annex A in this volume.

³ See e.g. Westerwelle, G., German Foreign Minister, Speech at the conference 'From a nuclear test ban to a nuclear weapons-free world', Astana, 29 Aug. 2012, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2012/120829-BM_Astana.html>.

⁴ Kulesa, Ł. (ed.), *The Future of NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture: Views from Central Europe* (Polish Institute of International Affairs: Warsaw, Dec. 2012).

⁵ NATO (note 1), para. 30.

⁶ NATO (note 1), para. 8.

This section first describes the history of reductions in NATO non-strategic nuclear forces prior to the DDP. It then identifies three key issues raised during the review: harmonizing NATO's nuclear declaratory policy with the positions of its nuclear-armed member states; the modernization of non-strategic nuclear capabilities; and the relationship between missile defence and nuclear forces. Finally, it considers NATO's role in a future arms control agenda.

Background: from the cold war to the 2010 Strategic Concept

During the cold war, many thousands of non-strategic nuclear weapons owned by the USA were located in Europe. Some were earmarked for use by US armed forces stationed in Europe and others for release to specially trained and equipped forces of the USA's NATO allies. In addition, the nuclear forces of France and the United Kingdom included a range of different types of nuclear weapon.

After the end of the cold war NATO's nuclear forces underwent a major rationalization. Between 1991 and 1993, NATO reduced the number of US non-strategic weapons located in Europe by roughly 85 per cent, and reduced the categories of deployed weapons from five to just one: a nuclear gravity bomb dropped by a specially equipped combat aircraft.⁷ Neither NATO nor the USA release any official information about non-strategic nuclear weapon stockpiles, but in 2009 it was believed that the total number of US non-strategic warheads was roughly 500, including 400 B61 gravity bombs earmarked for delivery by dual-capable combat aircraft (i.e. aircraft capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear weapons) and 100 warheads for the Tomahawk sea-launch cruise missile (SLCM).⁸ A significant number of these were stored in continental USA, while the number of locations where US-owned weapons were deployed in Europe continued to diminish. Following their removal from Greece in 2001 and the UK in 2008, by 2009 it was believed that roughly 200 US weapons were deployed at six air bases in five European countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.⁹

In 2009 two events sparked an internal debate on the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy. In April in Prague, Czech Republic, US Presi-

⁷ NATO, 'NATO's nuclear forces in the new security environment', Fact sheet, June 2004, <http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.nato.int/issues/nuclear/sec-environment.htm>. At the same time Russia was independently taking steps to rationalize its nuclear arsenal.

⁸ Kile, S. N., Fedchenko, V. and Kristensen, H. M., 'World nuclear forces', *SIPRI Yearbook 2009*, table 8.2 and p. 352.

⁹ Kile et al. (note 8), p. 352; and Kristensen, H. M., 'U.S. nuclear weapons removed from the United Kingdom', Strategic Security Blog, Federation of American Scientists, 26 June 2008, <<http://blogs.fas.org/security/2008/06/us-nuclear-weapons-withdrawn-from-the-united-kingdom/>>. See also chapter 6, section I, in this volume.

dent Barack Obama made a commitment 'to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons'.¹⁰ In September the German Government led by the newly re-elected Chancellor Angela Merkel included in its coalition agreement a commitment to raise the issue of withdrawing US nuclear weapons from Germany as a step towards realizing Obama's Prague vision.¹¹

In most NATO member states, the sudden promotion of the role of nuclear weapons as an issue for discussion by senior leaders was an unwelcome surprise. Most countries were simply not prepared for the debate, having relegated nuclear issues far down their lists of planning priorities. The issue distracted attention from topics considered more urgent and raised potentially divisive questions about alliance cohesion and burden sharing.

During 2010 language was agreed for the NATO Strategic Concept that was sufficiently ambiguous to cover a range of future options, from maintaining the status quo to complete removal of US weapons from Europe. The final document noted that deterrence, 'based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of [NATO's] overall strategy' and that NATO members would 'ensure the broadest possible participation of allies in collective defence planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces, and in command, control and consultation arrangements', without clarifying what 'appropriate mix' or 'broadest possible participation' meant in practice.¹² In contrast, the previous Strategic Concept, from 1999, emphasized that a credible nuclear posture required 'widespread participation by European Allies involved in collective defence planning in nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces on their territory and in command, control and consultation arrangements', noted that nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO 'provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance' and stated that NATO would therefore 'maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe'.¹³

While some member states argued that further clarification of the 2010 Strategic Concept was not needed, others disagreed. The DDPR was intended to provide a forum in which allies could continue to discuss some of the issues raised in 2010—not limited to the stationing of US nuclear

¹⁰ White House, 'Remarks by President Barack Obama, Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic', 5 Apr. 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/>.

¹¹ *Growth. Education. Unity. The Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and FDP for the 17th Legislative Period* (CDU/CSU/FDP: Berlin, 26 Oct. 2009), pp. 169–70.

¹² NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO: Brussels, Nov. 2010), paras 17, 19.

¹³ NATO, 'The alliance's strategic concept', Approved at Washington, DC, 24 Apr. 1999, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm>, para. 63.

weapons in Europe, but including NATO declaratory policy on nuclear weapons, the relationship between deterrence and defence in light of the decision to make missile defence a core mission of NATO, and the role of NATO in future arms control talks with Russia (the mandate of which is expected to include non-strategic nuclear weapons).¹⁴

The 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review

Three aspects of nuclear policy seem to have formed the main focus of the DDPR: harmonizing NATO nuclear declaratory policy with the national positions of nuclear-armed member states; the modernization of non-strategic nuclear capabilities; and the relationship between missile defence and nuclear forces.

Harmonizing NATO nuclear declaratory policy with the national positions of nuclear-armed member states

The 2010 NATO Strategic Concept was preceded by national reviews of nuclear policy in each of the three NATO member states that possesses nuclear weapons—France, the UK and the USA. One issue taken up in each of these reviews was the circumstances under which nuclear weapons might be used. All three countries emphasized that the likelihood of any scenario arising in which nuclear weapons might be used is extremely remote.¹⁵

Given the benign security environment in the NATO area and the preponderance of allied conventional forces relative to the countries around its periphery, the question arose whether a ‘sole purpose’ declaration—in which the only scenario for nuclear weapon use in a NATO framework would be as retaliation following a nuclear attack—might be possible. Nevertheless, all of the nuclear-armed NATO members can envisage circumstances where being the first to use nuclear weapons could be justified.

France, the UK and the USA have all given ‘negative security assurances’, essentially promising not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states parties to the 1968 Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT) under almost any con-

¹⁴ The process by which the DDPR was conducted is described in Lunn, S. and Kearns, I., *NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review: A Status Report*, NATO Policy Brief no. 1 (European Leadership Network: London, Feb. 2012).

¹⁵ French Government, *Défense et sécurité nationale: Le livre blanc* [Defence and national security: the white paper] (Odile Jacob: Paris, June 2008); British Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948 (Stationery Office: London, Oct. 2010); and US Department of Defense (DOD), *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (DOD: Washington, DC, Apr. 2010).

ditions.¹⁶ Moreover, the language of the negative security assurances offered by the three countries is almost identical. The DDPR acknowledged the importance of these assurances and the guarantee that nuclear weapons ‘will not be used or threatened to be used against Non-Nuclear Weapon States that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations’.¹⁷ However, the decision about whether or not a non-nuclear weapon state is in compliance with its obligations would be taken by the nuclear weapon state concerned, perhaps in consultation with its NATO allies.

The modernization of non-strategic nuclear capabilities

The DDPR underlined that the allies concerned ‘will ensure that all components of NATO’s nuclear deterrent remain safe, secure, and effective for as long as NATO remains a nuclear alliance’.¹⁸ NATO has enhanced security measures at sites where nuclear weapons are stored, partly in response to the revelation in 2010 that peace activists had repeatedly breached perimeter security undetected.¹⁹ However, according to a senior Polish official the text in the DDPR is apparently ‘related primarily to the replacement of aging delivery means’.²⁰

The five European countries that currently take part in the nuclear sharing arrangements sustain their participation using dual-capable combat aircraft. They can keep these aircraft in service until approximately 2020, but all are aware that a decision on an eventual replacement (if any) will be needed well before then. In the framework of its 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the USA decided to produce a nuclear-capable version of the F-35 (Joint Strike Fighter, JSF) combat aircraft.²¹ Of the five, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey are also part of the international programme to procure the JSF, while Belgium and Germany are not.

Since the USA retired the Tomahawk SLCM in accordance with the NPR, only one type of non-strategic weapon remains in its arsenal—the B61 gravity bomb.²² Over the coming years the USA plans to consolidate the existing types of B61 into one, designated the B61-12, that can be delivered by both

¹⁶ French Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, Statement concerning security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon states, 6 Apr. 1995, annex to UN document A/50/154-S/1995/264, 6 Apr. 1995; British Government (note 15), para. 3.7; and US Department of Defense (note 15), p. 15. For a summary and other details of the NPT see annex A in this volume.

¹⁷ NATO (note 1), para. 10.

¹⁸ NATO (note 1), para. 11.

¹⁹ E.g. Grossman, E. M., ‘More activist intrusions at Belgian nuclear base stoke worries’, Global Security Newswire, 22 Oct. 2010, <<http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/more-activist-intrusions-at-belgian-nuclear-base-stoke-worries/>>.

²⁰ Quoted in Meier, O., ‘NATO sticks with nuclear policy’, *Arms Control Today*, vol. 42, no. 5 (June 2012).

²¹ US Department of Defense (note 15), pp. 27–28, 34–35.

²² See chapter 6, section I, in this volume; and US Department of Defense (note 15), p. 46.

forward-based dual-capable combat aircraft and the long-range B2 strategic bomber.²³ After this consolidation, the need for US nuclear weapons to be located in Europe may be questioned further since the identical munition can be delivered to a target by a B2 strategic bomber based in the USA.²⁴

The relationship between missile defence and nuclear forces

At their 2010 summit in Lisbon, NATO leaders decided that, in the light of the on-going proliferation of ballistic missiles with greater range and larger payloads relatively close to the territory of NATO, a ballistic missile defence capacity would strengthen the collective defence commitment. Prior to 2010, NATO states had cooperated on missile defence programmes intended to protect armed forces in the field from attack by short-range missiles. However, in Lisbon the mandate was extended to include full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces against attack by small numbers of ballistic missiles of the type proliferating close to Europe.²⁵

In 2012 NATO leaders announced that an interim capability for missile defence had been achieved, based on the US decision to contribute the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) to NATO missile defence.²⁶ The EPAA was a 2009 modification to the US national missile defence programme.

In September and October 2011 the first decisions were reached on the future operational elements of the EPAA: that Turkey would host an AN/TPY-2 transportable surveillance radar; that Romania would host the land-based launch site for the RIM-161 Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) system; that the Netherlands would equip four frigates with surveillance radars compatible with the EPAA; that Poland would later also host a land-based launch site for SM-3 missiles; and that Spain would serve as a home port for four US Navy destroyers equipped with the Aegis ballistic missile defence system.²⁷ After 2015, the EPAA will include a significant land-based

²³ See chapter 6, section I, in this volume.

²⁴ Ted Seay, a former adviser to the US Ambassador to NATO, has noted that in the unlikely event that a nuclear weapon should need to be delivered, the option of using a dual-capable combat aircraft 'would be one of the least preferable for a military commander, and an almost certain suicide mission for the pilots concerned'. Seay, E. E. III, *Theatre Nuclear Weapons and the Next Round of Bilateral New START Treaty Follow-on Talks*, Arms Control Association (ACA), British American Security Information Council (BASIS) and Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) Nuclear Policy Paper no. 12 (ACA/BASIS/IFSH: Washington, DC/London/Hamburg, Jan. 2013), p. 4.

²⁵ NATO (note 12), para. 19.

²⁶ NATO, 'NATO declares interim missile defence capability', 20 May 2012, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_87599.htm>; and NATO (note 1), para. 19.

²⁷ NATO, 'Ballistic missile defence', 8 May 2012, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49635.htm>.

element on the territory of NATO, primarily in the south-eastern part. However, the interim capability depends on the deployment of US ships.²⁸

The DDPR emphasized that missile defence should be seen as a complement to—not a substitute for—the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence, first because an adversary with limited missile capabilities might be reluctant to use them if there was no guarantee of success, and second because the possibility of effective defence may reduce the need for a pre-emptive strike on the ballistic missile force of an adversary in a crisis.²⁹ The review emphasized that this capability ‘is not oriented against Russia’, and that it does not have technical elements that could undermine Russia’s strategic deterrent—although the Russian Government and military remain unconvinced.³⁰

In December 2012, in response to a request by Turkey, three members of NATO—Germany, the Netherlands and the USA—agreed to deploy batteries of Patriot short-range missiles to Turkey under the operational command of NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander over armed forces in Europe (SACEUR). NATO has described the deployment as forming part of the air defence of Turkey, rather than portraying it as an element of missile defence.³¹ However, the US Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, noted that one purpose of the deployment was to provide Turkey with some missile defence capability.³² Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the NATO Secretary General, drew attention to the use of short-range ballistic missiles by the Syrian Government in its ongoing internal conflict as one rationale for support to Turkey.³³

NATO and the future arms control agenda

The Obama administration has made clear that after the entry into force of the 2010 Russian–US Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) in 2011, the USA intended to pursue further reductions in strategic, non-strategic and non-

²⁸ US Department of State, ‘United States European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) and NATO Missile Defense’, 3 May 2011, <<http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/162447.htm>>.

²⁹ NATO (note 1), para. 20.

³⁰ NATO (note 1), para. 21. The Russian Government laid out its objections and concerns about missile defence at an international conference in May 2012 organized by the Russian Ministry of Defence. See RIA Novosti, ‘International conference on missile defense in Moscow’, May 2012, <http://en.rian.ru/trend/conference_missile_defense_moscow_2012/>; and Russian Ministry of Defence, [Conference on missile defence], 3–4 May 2012, <http://mil.ru/conference_of_pro.htm> (in Russian). On earlier developments see Kile, S. N., ‘Russian–US nuclear arms control’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2012*, pp. 359–61.

³¹ NATO, ‘NATO foreign ministers’ statement on Patriot deployment to Turkey’, 4 Dec. 2012.

³² Pellerin, C., American Forces Press Service, ‘Panetta signs order to deploy 400 U.S. personnel to Turkey’, US Department of Defense, 14 Dec. 2012, <<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=118797>>.

³³ ‘Syria regime firing Scud-type missiles at rebels: NATO’, Agence France-Presse, 12 Dec. 2012.

deployed nuclear weapons.³⁴ If this is the basis for a next phase of bilateral nuclear arms control, then negotiations with Russia will include issues in which NATO allies directly participate.

The DDPN explained that ‘NATO is prepared to consider further reducing its requirement for non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to the Alliance in the context of reciprocal steps by Russia, taking into account the greater Russian stockpiles of non-strategic nuclear weapons stationed in the Euro-Atlantic area.’³⁵ To that end, NATO will continue to examine the implications of different scenarios, ‘including in case NATO were to decide to reduce its reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe’.³⁶

NATO is highly unlikely to be a negotiating partner in future talks with Russia. To manage the internal discussion of issues of direct concern to NATO, the DDPN agreed on a new consultative and advisory forum on arms control as a permanent committee, chaired by a member of the NATO International Staff, reporting to the North Atlantic Council—NATO’s highest decision-making body. The new committee will allow NATO members to discuss among themselves the possible elements of a future dialogue with Russia on non-strategic nuclear weapons, including confidence- and security-building measures.³⁷ It will also act as an advisory forum in which the USA can keep other NATO member states informed on the scope and content of bilateral discussions with Russia on various aspects of strategic stability, including nuclear arms control, missile defences and conventional arms control.

As well as linking reductions in the non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to the alliance to reciprocal steps by Russia, the DDPN offered support and encouragement to the mutual efforts by Russia and the USA to enhance transparency and further reduce their nuclear forces. NATO plans to seek dialogue with Russia on aspects of nuclear arms control in ways that complement the bilateral Russia–USA process. While NATO–Russia dialogue would not have a direct role in determining NATO’s nuclear policy or force posture, the DDPN recommended developing transparency and confidence-building ideas in the NATO–Russia Council, ‘with the goal of developing detailed proposals on and increasing mutual understanding of NATO’s and Russia’s non-strategic nuclear force postures in Europe’.³⁸ During 2012 the NATO allies began to consider initial proposals that may be put to Russia, which are reported to include dialogue about nuclear

³⁴ Kile (note 30), pp. 361–62; and New START (note 2).

³⁵ NATO (note 1), para. 26.

³⁶ NATO (note 1), para. 12.

³⁷ NATO (note 1), para. 30. The mandate of this forum, known as the Special Advisory and Consultative Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Committee, was agreed on 8 Feb. 2013. Meier, O., ‘NATO agrees on new arms control body’, *Arms Control Now*, 26 Feb. 2013, <<http://armscontrolnow.org/2013/02/26/nato-agrees-on-new-arms-control-body/>>.

³⁸ NATO (note 1), para. 25.

doctrine and the possibility of reciprocal unilateral actions to relocate or dismantle specified nuclear weapons.³⁹

As noted above, the USA continuously raised the issue of next steps in arms control with Russia in 2011–12. While NATO member states began to try to elaborate proposals that they might introduce at some point, it was recognized that any serious engagement with Russia would have to wait until after the result of the US presidential election in November 2012 was known.

Looking forward, the prospects for successful negotiated reductions in non-strategic nuclear weapons will require the USA, together with its NATO allies, and Russia to modify what were, in 2012, incompatible positions. At the end of 2012 there was no indication that such modifications would be forthcoming and it appeared that the future nuclear forces would be shaped less by cooperation through negotiated arms control and more by economic factors combined with evolving internal analyses of the threat environment.

³⁹ Grossman, E. M., 'Seeking Kremlin engagement, NATO weighs next nuclear posture steps', *Global Security Newswire*, 13 Sep. 2012, <<http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/seeking-kremlin-engagement-nato-weighs-next-nuclear-posture-steps/>>.