

Role of Nuclear Weapons in NATO Security

28 September 2010

1. NATO remains a collective security alliance whose purpose, as embodied in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, is to defend the territorial integrity of all of its member states. To do so, NATO maintains military capabilities (1) to deter any attack and, in the event deterrence fails, either (2) to defeat such an attack if it occurs or (3) to convince the aggressor government that it has miscalculated, that the costs of war far exceed any possible gains, and that the aggressor should cease its attack and withdraw immediately from NATO territory.
2. NATO faces a complex and evolving security environment that is characterized by strategic uncertainty and new security challenges, such as cyber threats, terrorism, and the increasing risk of economic coercion. While NATO's nuclear forces have little or no role in addressing these new 21st century security challenges, NATO's nuclear forces will continue to play an essential role in dealing with more traditional threats that still exist, including WMD proliferation. To this end, NATO remains a nuclear and conventional alliance with nuclear weapons providing a critical political and military link between its members.
3. Many of the nations which have joined NATO since the end of the Cold War did so in no small part to obtain the security benefits of the "nuclear umbrella" which is an inherent element of Alliance strategy in implementing the Article 5 guarantee. NATO's nuclear forces are not war-fighting assets; rather, they bring uncertainty in a potential adversary's mind, making the costs of any aggression both incalculable and overwhelming. The ultimate pillar of NATO's security is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance. While the United States assumes the principal burden of this role, the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France also contribute to overall deterrence and to the security of the Alliance.
4. The role of NATO's nuclear forces will continue to evolve as security circumstances change. The issue that NATO faces today is not whether to introduce new nuclear capabilities into Europe but how best to maintain its long-time nuclear deterrence policy. Maintaining Alliance nuclear burden and risk sharing has included basing U.S. nuclear forces on the territory of NATO members. Continued participation by European allies in NATO nuclear planning, training, decision-making, and, if necessary, operational missions is essential to demonstrate Alliance solidarity to friend and potential enemy alike.
5. NATO nuclear burden sharing, including the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe, is perceived by many allies as the most tangible representation of the nuclear element of NATO's collective security guarantee. Some have questioned the continued utility of that presence and have raised concerns about the security of these weapons, the cost of modernization, and the implications for disarmament and nonproliferation if they are retained. Recognizing the changing security environment, NATO has reduced the number of U.S. nuclear weapons stationed in Europe from about 7,300 in 1973 to a few hundred today.

Following consultations within the Alliance, further reductions should be considered in the context of U.S.-Russian arms control negotiations. Any NATO government considering making radical changes to such basing in the near-term, however, would need to weigh the countervailing political effects in other NATO countries and in the minds of potential adversaries.

6. If European members of NATO are unwilling to bear the political and financial costs of continued nuclear burden sharing, this could cause questioning within the United States as to why it should continue to place the U.S. homeland at risk by underwriting NATO's security with U.S. strategic forces. Moreover, withdrawing U.S. nuclear weapons to promote non-proliferation may have the reverse effect – non-nuclear countries that are covered by NATO's nuclear umbrella may reconsider their nonproliferation commitments.
7. Considering the importance of burden sharing in the Alliance, any decision about U.S. nuclear weapons based in Europe should be an Alliance-wide decision, consistent with the collective nature of the Alliance. Allied participation in the nuclear mission also lends credibility to their voice on the future of NATO's nuclear policy, including approaches to arms control and disarmament. In addition, maintaining Alliance solidarity provides more leverage in negotiating reductions in U.S.-Russian non-strategic nuclear forces in Europe.
8. While the United States believes it must retain approximate parity in strategic nuclear capabilities with Russia, NATO does not need to maintain a similar balance with Russia in non-strategic nuclear weapons. Russia's non-strategic nuclear forces, however, vastly exceed the requirements of any reasonable political or military strategy and should be reduced significantly. The United States is committed to the negotiation of deeper arms reductions in the future, with the objective of including non-strategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons in those discussions. Formal arms control negotiations do not preclude bilateral transparency measures in the interim.
9. To ensure a credible nuclear deterrent, it is essential to maintain the safety, security, and operational effectiveness of NATO's nuclear weapons and delivery systems. NATO should maintain its nuclear forces at the minimum level sufficient to preserve peace and stability. This will require some improvements in storage facilities and over the longer term the replacement and modernization of some components of B-61 nuclear bombs and the replacement of aircraft currently used to deliver NATO's nuclear bombs. In this same context, the Alliance may also need to examine, in the future, innovative ways which could maintain the U.S. nuclear presence in Europe.

###

United States:

Barry M. Blechman
Distinguished Fellow
Henry L. Stimson Center

Linton Brooks
Former Administrator
National Nuclear Security
Administration

Eric Edelman
Distinguished Fellow
Center for Strategic and
Budgetary Assessments

Stephen Flanagan
Senior Vice President and
Henry A. Kissinger Chair
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

John J. Hamre
President and CEO
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

Jenifer Mackby
Fellow
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

Franklin Miller
Former Senior White House and
Department of Defense Official

Clark Murdock
Senior Adviser
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

Robert Nurick
Consultant

George Perkovich
Vice President for Studies
Director, Nuclear Policy Program
Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace

Sharon Squassoni
Director and Senior Fellow
Proliferation Prevention Program
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

James Tegnelia
Former Director
Defense Threat Reduction Agency

United Kingdom:

Desmond Bowen
Former Policy Director
Ministry of Defence

Tim Hare
Defence Consultant
Former Director Nuclear Policy
Ministry of Defence

David Jarvis CBE
Former Chief Strategic Systems
Executive
Ministry of Defence

Sir Richard Mottram GCB
Former Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Defence

Sir David Omand GCB
Visiting Professor
Department of War Studies
King's College
London

Sir Keith O'Nions FRS
Rector
Imperial College London

**Sir Kevin Tebbit KCB
CMG**
Visiting Professor
Queen Mary London University

Lee Willett
Head
Maritime Studies Programme
Royal United Services Institute

France:

Benoît d'Aboville
Conseiller-maître en S.E.
Cour des Comptes

Thérèse Delpech
Senior Research Fellow
Centre d'Etudes et de
Recherches Internationales
Paris

Etienne de Durand
Director
Centre des Etudes de Sécurité
Institut français des relations
internationales (Ifri)

Camille Grand
Director
Fondation pour la recherche
stratégique
Paris

Bruno Racine
Chairman
Fondation pour la recherche
stratégique
Paris

Bruno Tertrais
Senior Research Fellow
Fondation pour la recherche
stratégique
Paris