



Promoting a more transparent and accountable NATO

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The elephant in the room:

general security concerns among some officials in a few eastern European NATO countries have been allowed to attribute an importance to US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe that is not credible. The security concerns of those countries are about 'glue' (alliance cohesion) and not about nuclear weapons

## NATO Watch Chicago Summit Media Briefings Series

### No.6 The Defence and Deterrence Posture Review: Plumbing the depths of the lowest common denominator

#### Anticipated outcomes

In a welcome move towards greater transparency, a document setting out key principles from the Defence and Deterrence Posture Review (DDPR) is expected to be made public. But NATO is unlikely to have resolved the long-festering debate over its nuclear posture. A few governments that continue to perceive a need for the presence of forward-based US nuclear weapons to provide reassurance and linkages to North America are expected to prevent consensus on the weapons' removal. However, the alliance will need to confront the issue again before long in the light of expensive modernisations plans and the 2010 pledge to contribute to global nuclear disarmament.

#### The back story

In May 2010 a [Group of Experts recommended](#) a New Strategic Concept for NATO. With regard to nuclear weapons policy, they suggested a theme of 'Solidarity in Pursuit of Peace':

*As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO should continue to maintain secure and reliable nuclear forces, with widely shared responsibility for deployment and operational support, at the minimum level required by the prevailing security environment. Any change in this policy, including in the geographic distribution of NATO nuclear deployments in Europe, should be made, as with other major decisions, by the Alliance as a whole. The Strategic Concept should also affirm NATO's full support for efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, ensure that nuclear materials are handled in a safe and secure manner, and make progress towards a world free from the fear of nuclear war. In this spirit, the Alliance has dramatically curtailed the types and numbers of sub-strategic nuclear forces in Europe and should welcome consultations with Russia in pursuit of increased transparency and further mutual reductions.*

The [2010 Strategic Concept](#) committed NATO to the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons – but reconfirmed that, as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance, stating:

*Collective defence is the Alliance's greatest responsibility and "deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element" of NATO's overall strategy. While stressing that the Alliance does not consider any country to be its adversary, it provides a comprehensive list of capabilities the Alliance aims to maintain and develop to counter existing and emerging threats. These threats include the proliferation of nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and other weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery; terrorism, cyber attacks and key environmental and resource constraints.*

#### Hiding behind secrecy and consensus rules

The 2010 Lisbon Summit mandated the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to conduct a DDPR on "the range of NATO's strategic capabilities required, including NATO's nuclear posture, and missile defence and other means of strategic deterrence and defence". There has been no news items posted on the [NAC webpage](#) since September 2009. A search for 'Defence and Deterrence Posture Review' on the NATO website results in an unhelpful 'Your search did not match any documents'. There is no information about NATO's nuclear forces on [NATO's nuclear forces](#) webpage.

[NATO's Nuclear Planning Group](#) (NPG) takes decisions on the Alliance's nuclear policy, which is kept under constant review and modified or adapted in the light of new developments. The Defence Ministers of all member countries, except France, meet at regular intervals in the NPG, where they discuss specific policy issues associated with nuclear forces. There has been no news items posted on the [NPG webpage](#) since June 2009.

Previewing the Chicago Summit at an April conference in Washington DC on 'Revitalising NATO', [Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall](#), Special Assistant to the US President and Senior Director for European Affairs, National Security Staff said:

*The DDPR will identify the appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities that NATO needs to meet 21st century security challenges. We expect it to be approved by NATO heads of state and*



NATO is undertaking an expensive nuclear escalation by default



just as each country has the right to either join or leave NATO, each country hosting US nuclear weapons has the right to negotiate removal of those weapons from their sovereign territory

government in Chicago. And it will reaffirm NATO's determination to maintain modern and flexible capabilities.

She fielded a range of questions afterwards, none addressed the DDPR.

With no substantive *official* information in the public domain about what has been discussed in NAC and NPG meetings with regard to the DDPR, it has been left to arms control and NATO analysts to glean whatever they have been able to from unofficial briefings and conversations. And there have been no shortage of reports, briefings and recommendations from this community (see past editions of [NATO Watch Observatory](#) for further details). In sum, what we do know from independent analysis is that NATO possesses some 180 B-61 free-fall tactical nuclear bombs in Europe stored at bases in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Turkey. These bombs, relics of the Cold War and property of the United States, have no guidance systems and are regarded as having no real military purpose or value. Some have previously been withdrawn from Greece and the UK, while repeated efforts to move NATO, collectively, in the direction of further agreed withdrawals are being blocked by a lack of consensus.

Following a long line of recent appeals by former statesmen and military leaders to remove the threat of nuclear weapons, [Helmut Schmidt](#) and [Sam Nunn](#), said on 13 April:

*We believe the United States and Germany, NATO and all of Europe, including Russia, have a special leadership role to play in support of global efforts to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons, to prevent their spread into dangerous hands, and ultimately to end them as a threat to the world.*

However, [a small number of voices](#) within the alliance continue to thwart such leadership by NATO.

### **NATO nuclear force 'escalating by default'**

The projected expense of [modernising the US B-61 nuclear bombs](#) based in Europe has risen to \$6 billion. [Mia Steinle](#), Investigator for the US Project On Government Oversight, has suggested that, "The cost of this Life Extension Programme (LEP) would fall squarely on the shoulders of American taxpayers". However, European countries, whose pilots are trained to deliver the B-61s to their targets, are also facing expensive decisions to replace their existing aircraft with the US F35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), whose cost has risen to more than \$100m each.

By preparing to replace these 'dumb' free-fall nuclear bombs and ageing delivery aircraft with precision-guided weapons that would be carried by the JSF, NATO is also undertaking an expensive nuclear escalation by default, according to [Ted Seay](#), who until last year was arms control adviser to the US mission at NATO. These plans would increase tension with Moscow at a time when the alliance and Russia are already locked in a tense standoff over missile defence.

### **NATO Watch conclusion**

The proposed upgrade of NATO's tactical nuclear forces in Europe will be expensive and destabilising. It is also unnecessary: all NATO states are fully secure without this additional capability. As Stephen M. Walt at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government concluded in a *Foreign Policy* article '[Time to get U.S. nukes out of Europe](#)' on 18 April, "there is no good reason to keep them there and plenty of good reasons to remove them".

As 'burden sharing' is a recurring and contentious issue in the United States and efforts will be made to address this transatlantic imbalance in Chicago (see Briefing No.5), a declaration of withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe would have served several purposes, not least the financial benefits of drawing down the cost of maintenance and support of an entire weapons system which is unloved and unwanted by most Europeans and the US military.

However, the almost certain failure of the Chicago Summit to reach a similar conclusion says much about the alliance's failure to adapt its decision-making. The framework of NATO's security policies has changed fundamentally over the past 20 years, but the way in which those policies are arrived at has not. Fundamental questions about transparency and accountability are highlighted by the DDPR process and nuclear decision-making in the alliance. Who are the North Atlantic Council and Nuclear Planning Group accountable to? Why are their deliberations not available for wider consideration and debate?

Some [commentators](#) have called for official recognition of individual national rights to negotiate the removal of nuclear weapons from their sovereign territory – just as each country has the right to either join or leave NATO. If such a move undermines 'collective nuclear security', then so be it. After Chicago that is where the debate is heading. There is no other choice, since most member states neither want nuclear weapon modernisation nor can afford to pay for it. At some future point NATO will also have to address the fundamental misalignment of member states dual commitment of 'nuclear sharing' while being signatory states to the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

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