

## NATO Nuclear Policy Issues

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With the approval of the DDPR, NATO says it has consensus on nuclear policy and the way forward. But I think the documents leave considerable uncertainty about what the priorities are: nuclear status quo (and modernization) or reductions and disarmament. Because the review had to gap widely different views, the result is a schizophrenic document that at the same time embraces nuclear status quo and disarmament.

The DDPR concluded that NATO's current nuclear posture meets the Alliance's deterrence and defense needs. That conclusion collides with plans to *improve* the nuclear capabilities in NATO over the next decade and a half. B61 bombs currently deployed in Europe will be returned to the United States from 2016 and converted into a precision-guided nuclear bomb (B61-12) and then returned to Europe with improved military capabilities from around 2019/2020. In addition, a new stealth fighter-bomber – the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter – is under construction to begin deployment to Europe in the early 2020s. If the current posture meets the needs, why must it be improved?

The B61 Life-Extension Program, as it is officially called, is very expensive (currently more than \$10 billion), and the high cost is partly said to be necessary to upgrade safety and security features of the bomb. It is somewhat of a mystery why that is necessary given that the weapons in Europe are always said to be safe and secure. Although new use-control features will be added, at least one important safety deficiency will not be fixed: Like the current version, the B61-12 will not have a fire-resistant pit (plutonium core). Fire-resistant pits are installed in more modern U.S. nuclear weapons to prevent the dispersal of plutonium in a fire, but since the B61-12 is reusing the warhead in the B61-4, the new weapon will have the same safety flaw.

Safety and security of the weapons in Europe has been an issue many times. In 2005, I disclosed that the U.S. Air Force in 1997 had discovered that a lightning strike during maintenance on the bases in Europe could have triggered a nuclear explosion. In 2008, I disclosed that a U.S. Air Force review had found that the European nuclear storage sites did not meet U.S. security standards. Rather than stored in one or a few central storage sites, the weapons in Europe are scattered across Europe in nearly 100 aircraft shelters at six bases in five countries. This unique deployment form significantly increases the number of points where accidents and incidents can potentially happen.

The combination of precision-guidance of the B61-12 and stealth of the F-35 will significantly increase the capability of NATO's nuclear posture compared with today. With greater penetration capability and range, an F-35 with the B61-12 will be able to hold a risk harder and more heavily defended targets than is the case today with the B61-4 on the F-16 or Tornado. In addition, targets that today would require selection of a relatively high yield with the B61-4 in order to be destroyed, can with the more accurate B61-12 be held at risk with a smaller yield, thus significantly reducing the radioactive fallout created by a nuclear attack.

While NATO may not intend to deploy more "useable" nuclear weapons, this will nonetheless be the result. National leaders are unlikely to be more willing to authorize use of nuclear weapons, but in a crisis lower yield might be a factor. And those potential adversaries that closely monitor NATO's capabilities may see it differently. The U.S. Air Force tried in the early 1990s to get a precision-guided nuclear bomb, but Congress refused to fund it because of concern that such a weapon could be seen to be more useable. Now it seems part of this concept has resurfaced in the form of the B61-12.

Whether or not one believes it is necessary to continue deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe, NATO's nuclear posture must be in sync with the goals of reducing the numbers and role of nuclear weapons and create the conditions for a world free of them. The posture must reassure Allies to the extent necessary, but not contradict, undercut or complicate arms control efforts with potential adversaries. Indeed, because of its active and prominent role in the nuclear debate, I believe that a country such as Germany has a special responsibility to challenge the decision to increase the accuracy of the bombs in Europe, or otherwise be able to explain why Germany has decided that it is necessary for German pilots to begin to deliver precision-guided nuclear weapons. Such a mission development neither seems like maintaining status quo nor working to create the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. Nuclear Posture Review promised that "Life Extension Programs (LEPs) will not...provide for new military capabilities." But increasing the accuracy of the B61 bomb with a precision-guided tail kit is a new military capability. There is currently no precision-guided nuclear bomb in Europe or in the U.S. arsenal.

Deploying improved nuclear capabilities in Europe is unlikely to help persuade Russia to constrain its non-strategic nuclear forces. On the contrary, the introduction of precision-guided nuclear weapons on stealth bombers has the potential of further complicating relations with Russia and provide easy arguments for hardliners in the Kremlin.

This is not just a *nuclear* issue because deployment of the stealthy F-35 is likely also to deepen Russia's concern and complaints about NATO's conventional superiority in Europe. It is this *conventional* disparity, more so than NATO's nuclear forces, that has caused the Russian military to increase reliance on its non-strategic nuclear weapons to compensate against NATO's superior conventional capabilities. When

reducing the role of nuclear weapons in Europe, NATO will have to be careful that compensation with non-nuclear forces doesn't end up further reinforcing Russian concerns about NATO's conventional superiority.

The political situation in Russia is not going well and bickering with NATO has increased. Even so, relations are nowhere near anything that resembles a Cold War situation. Therefore, it is important that NATO's reassurance to Eastern European Allies is a credible reassurance that addresses the kinds of security challenges they face today rather than relying on pieces of leftovers from the nuclear posture that was originally deployed in the 1950s to defeat the Soviet army.

Whatever one might think about U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe, pretending that they provide a credible reassurance is a disservice to Eastern European allies for the simple reason that these weapons are the least likely to ever be used in response to any of the security challenges that these countries face today or in the foreseeable future.

Reassurance should be based on a credible posture focused on non-nuclear capability and non-military relations. To the limited extent that nuclear forces play a role the ultimate security guarantee should be served by the long-range forces of the United States (and to a lesser extent Britain and France), as the Strategic Concept and DDPR stipulate. Neither of these documents assigns such a role to non-strategic nuclear weapons.

The Strategic Concept and DDPR state that any further reductions of U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe must take into account the disparity with the greater Russian inventory of such weapons. This is a change of policy compared with the first two decades after the end of the Cold War, during which NATO didn't care much about how many non-strategic nuclear weapons Russia had. Of course, disparity also existed in 1994, when the United States denuclearized its surface fleet; it also existed in 2001, when nuclear weapons were withdrawn from Greece; it also existed in the middle of the Bush administration, when the stockpile of nuclear weapons in Europe was cut by more than half and all weapons were withdrawn from the United Kingdom. And disparity existed in April 2010, when the Nuclear Posture Review decided to unilaterally retire the nuclear Tomahawk land-attack cruise missile.

I think disparity is a distraction that, especially when combined with preconditioned reciprocity, needlessly complicates the arms reduction and arms control process. Disparity is an outdated issue that doesn't matter today, unless you say that it matters. It is recycled arms control thinking from the Cold War.

NATO doesn't appear to know what it means when it says that disparity has to be taken into account – or it hasn't explained what it means. Does it mean that NATO wants parity with Russia on non-strategic nuclear weapons? Hardly. Russia has an estimated 2,000 non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned its non-strategic nuclear forces, while the United States has about 760 (of which nearly 200 are in Europe).

The U.S. number will drop to 500 soon and most likely further within the next decade – without demands about reciprocity or reducing disparity.

If parity is not the goal, how much disparity and of what kind is acceptable? For example, NATO has unilaterally eliminated all categories of non-strategic nuclear weapons except air-delivered bombs. Russia has not but still sees a need for naval, ground-launched, and defensive nuclear forces. Unless NATO is going to reintroduce non-strategic naval, ground and air-defense forces, with which part of the Russian posture does NATO then seek less disparity?

Does it mean that disparity is about air-delivered bombs? Limiting the disparity issue to that category, at least initially, would make more sense. In that category, the disparity is less: Russia 730 and the United States 500.

NATO needs to be more precise and deliberate about what it means when it talks about disparity. The problem is that the word “disparity” gives the impression in the public debate that the issue is about numbers and balance. But the disparity of nuclear forces is not just about *nuclear* forces but actually more about Russia compensating for the disparity in *conventional* forces. Therefore, it seems unlikely that NATO can get Russian agreement to reductions in the disparity of *nuclear* forces unless NATO agrees to reductions in the disparity of *conventional* forces. In other words, the arms control agenda must be tailored so that it takes into account the widely asymmetrical composition of NATO and Russian non-strategic nuclear forces.

That is, of course, if we need to pursue reductions in a complex arms control fashion. An alternative is that NATO simply moves forward with some unilateral steps and urges Russia to follow. This was the model that was followed in the early 1990s. One could envision several potential unilateral options:

- Withdraw weapons from host bases and concentrate them at one or two U.S. bases in Europe.
- Terminate the arrangement of assigning delivery of U.S. nuclear weapons to non-nuclear Allied countries, but continue burden-sharing with non-nuclear means such as SNOWCAT.
- Withdraw weapons from Europe to the United States but retain the capability to redeploy if necessary.
- End the mission of non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe and rely on non-nuclear and long-range forces for extended deterrence.

Now that the DDPR has been approved and validated nuclear status quo in Europe, several countries (including Germany) that previously appeared – at least in the public debate – to push for reducing the nuclear mission and presence in Europe, seem to shift their focus to increasing transparency of non-strategic nuclear forces.

While increasing transparency is important and must be pursued, it does not reduce nuclear forces or the role of nuclear weapons. Indeed, one could imagine that NATO and Russia agreed to significant transparency of their non-strategic nuclear forces without reducing anything. Therefore, it is important that European countries – in addition to working on increasing transparency – continue to push for reductions both internally in NATO and elsewhere.

Germany has actually had a significant effect over the past five years in shaping the public and internal debate on non-strategic nuclear weapons. It may not always have been easy or effective, but without it the debate would have been very different.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your questions.