

CHAPTER 3

NATO Nuclear Strategy Beyond the Cold War

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One of the loose ends still untied after the end of the Cold War is the question of how NATO countries should incorporate nuclear weapons in their defense strategy. Some clearer definition of the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's strategy may be a prerequisite for development of future approaches to controlling non-strategic nuclear weapons.

The Post-Cold War Context

NATO's Cold War strategy of flexible response was an imperfect doctrine but it served the Alliance well for over 25 years as a way to deter an attack on Western Europe by Warsaw Pact forces, to reassure European states (Germany in particular) of America's commitment to their defense, and to accommodate a variety of allied perspectives on nuclear weapons issues. Since 1989, the allies have largely focused their efforts in the nuclear field on countering nuclear proliferation. They have not produced a clear substitute for flexible response, although they have reaffirmed that nuclear weapons remain central to NATO's deterrence strategy. In the early glow of the post-Cold War era, the allies even described them as weapons of "last resort," although they subsequently put more emphasis on the constructive uncertainty that NATO's nuclear capabilities would raise in any potential adversary's mind.

Now, several factors—the process of enlarging NATO, NATO's evolving relationship with Russia, France's return to active military cooperation in NATO, and the process of developing a Common European Security and Defense Policy in the European Union (EU)—may lead the allies to give more attention to NATO's nuclear policies and posture in the coming years.

With regard to enlargement, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary have become NATO members and at least nine other candidates wait at the door, including the three Baltic states, formerly part of the Soviet Union. The allies have suggested that, among the responsibilities of membership, prospective new members would have to be prepared to accept nuclear weapons on their soil, should that become necessary, even though there is no current plan nor necessity to do so.

NATO seeks to develop a close cooperative relationship with Russia. At the same time, Russian officials have expressed their concern that NATO enlargement could bring nuclear weapons closer to Russian borders. An enhanced dialogue and cooperation with Russia on nuclear issues is seen by some as an avenue for reassuring the Russians about NATO nuclear policy.

With respect to EU nuclear cooperation, statements in the mid-1990s by French President Chirac once again raised the question of whether or not French nuclear forces, perhaps combined with British forces, could one day serve as a nuclear umbrella for all members of the European Union. Current plans for a Common European Security and Defense Policy exclude nuclear weapons cooperation. Under what circumstances might EU members rethink the issue?

An important underlying issue is the question of who, in the future, will provide nuclear guarantees for Germany. Will it continue to be the United States through NATO, a new European arrangement, or some combination of the two. Or will Germany be left to its own devices?

The U.S. nuclear arsenal in Western Europe is now limited to a few hundred free-fall nuclear bombs at sites in several allied states. These weapons are of questionable military utility and their function has become largely political—intended to ensure continued sharing of nuclear risks and responsibilities in the Alliance.

These factors, set against a dramatically changed threat environment, suggest that the NATO allies may be called on to

develop new perspectives on the role of nuclear weapons in Alliance strategy and perhaps some new consultative means to deal with those issues.

The Role of Nuclear Weapons in NATO's Strategy

From Massive Retaliation to Flexible Response

Nuclear weapons became an integral part of NATO strategy in 1954 when the United States, facing superior Soviet conventional forces in Europe, threatened "massive retaliation" against the Soviet Union in the case of a Soviet attack against Western Europe. By so doing, the United States "extended deterrence" to its European allies against a Soviet attack and created what also was referred to as a "nuclear umbrella" sheltering Western Europe.

By the early 1960s, the credibility of the massive retaliation threat was called into question by the reciprocal ability of the Soviet Union to hit U.S. cities with its nuclear weapons. Therefore, in 1967, the allies agreed to replace massive retaliation with the more nuanced "flexible response" doctrine designed to give NATO a variety of nuclear and conventional force responses to a Soviet attack.¹

In theory, flexible response required that the allies deploy conventional and nuclear forces sufficient to respond to a Warsaw Pact attack at any level and to escalate all the way to strategic nuclear strikes on the Soviet Union if necessary to terminate hostilities on acceptable terms. In fact, the Alliance never was in a position to respond to a Warsaw Pact attack with the full range of military options. But NATO did manage to sustain options that were considered sufficiently credible to deter aggression and to discourage Warsaw Pact escalatory steps once hostilities began. Experts debated for many years whether NATO or the Warsaw Pact would be able to "control" escalation in a European conflict, but the contending theories were fortunately never tested.

Because the Warsaw Pact nations deployed substantially greater numbers of conventional forces than the NATO countries,

NATO relied heavily on nuclear weapons to deter Pact use of its conventional capabilities, as well as to deter potential Soviet use of tactical nuclear weapons in a conflict. Flexible response included NATO's declared readiness to use nuclear weapons first if Western conventional defenses were failing to hold against a Warsaw Pact attack.

The vast majority of NATO's nuclear weapons systems were U.S. owned and operated. A portion of the nuclear inventory was for years under "dual-key" arrangements with NATO allies who had delivery systems for one or more types of U.S. nuclear weapons, including nuclear artillery shells, depth charges, short-range missile warheads, and free-fall bombs. The warheads for such systems were kept under U.S. control in peacetime but could have been transferred to non-nuclear allies for use with their delivery systems in war. British-owned and operated nuclear forces were also committed to NATO. France maintained its own independent strategic and tactical nuclear forces.

The main political role of U.S. nuclear forces in Europe was to ensure linkage to the broad spectrum of U.S. nuclear forces, most of which were strategic forces located in the United States or at sea. These forces included all three legs of the U.S. strategic "triad:" land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, sea-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic aircraft carrying bombs, air-launched cruise missiles, and short-range attack missiles.

U.S. nuclear weapons were deployed in forward locations in Europe, particularly in West Germany, to ensure that in the early stages of a Warsaw Pact attack on Western Europe the United States would face a "use 'em or lose 'em" decision. Thus, NATO's nuclear strategy, combined with extensive forward deployments, gave very specific meaning to the U.S. nuclear commitment to the defense of Europe. The mutual defense commitment in the Treaty of Washington said nothing about what nuclear risks the United States would be required to take on behalf of its European allies. That commitment was given

specific meaning by NATO's strategy and deployments, not by the language of Article 5.²

Although NATO never managed to match the Warsaw Pact's quantitative superiority in conventional forces, the disparity made it even more important that the Alliance not be "outgunned" in nuclear arms. Yet, by the late 1970s, NATO leaders had become increasingly alarmed by the introduction of Soviet triple-warhead SS-20 mobile missiles capable of striking throughout European NATO territory. NATO's response, in its attempt to preserve a credible flexible response strategy, was articulated by NATO ministers in December 1979 in the Alliance's "dual track" decision to improve its own long-range theater systems while at the same time pursuing the arms negotiations with the Soviet Union. Both tracks were severely tested over the next several years. Only after overcoming strong domestic opposition from their own populations (accompanied by an intensive Soviet peace campaign) were the European allies finally able to commit to the stationing of new Ground Launched Cruise Missiles and Pershing II ballistic missiles in their countries. Arms control efforts were also stymied for nearly half a decade until the reality of the GLCM and Pershing deployments made negotiations more compelling to the Soviets.³

The main rationale for the deployment of the INF missiles, which could hit Soviet territory from locations in Western Europe, was to help convince the Soviet Union that a war in Europe could not be kept at the conventional level and escalation would put Soviet territory at risk. Unlike U.S. strategic nuclear systems, the INF missiles would become vulnerable to preemptive attack early in a European war, potentially forcing an early use decision by the United States rather than risk losing them to capture or destruction.

On December 8, 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty designed to eliminate two categories of their intermediate range nuclear missiles: long-range INF (LRINF), with a range between 600 and 3,400 miles; and short-range INF (SRINF), with a range between 300 and 600 miles. The treaty did not

cover short-range (under 300 miles) nuclear force (SNF) missiles. In this shorter-range category, NATO countries still had the aging Lance missile system with approximately 700 nuclear warheads, deployed in Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom under dual-key arrangements with the United States. These missiles could not reach Soviet targets from their launch sites in Europe and therefore were not of great concern to Moscow and did not accomplish the same strategic objectives intended in deployment of the INF missiles.

Although European as well as American public opinion strongly supported the INF Treaty, some observers judged that elimination of the missiles would undermine the credibility of flexible response, and argued that the Alliance would have to compensate for the loss of the INF missiles to keep its strategy intact. Others argued, however, that the United States still committed a small—but strategically significant—portion of its relatively invulnerable sea-launched ballistic missile force for use by NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, and that this force plus nuclear weapons carried on FB-111 and B-52 bombers based in the United States preserved a strategic strike potential for NATO. They also argued that a substantial U.S. troop presence in Europe served as a "tripwire," and thus ensured linkage to U.S. strategic nuclear forces.

In addition, British and French strategic capabilities, capable of hitting targets in the Soviet Union, which were not included either in the INF negotiations or in U.S.-Soviet strategic arms talks, were being modernized and expanded.

End of the Cold War

Virtually all decisions that NATO had taken on allied nuclear forces were called into question after Communist regimes across Eastern Europe began to crumble and the Berlin Wall was opened in November 1989. Although it took another two years for the Warsaw Pact to disband and the Soviet Union to dissolve, by early 1990 the threat to Europe that U.S. nuclear weapons were originally intended to deter was vanishing.

On May 3, 1990, President Bush told a Washington press conference that the United States would not modernize the obsolete Lance missile system or U.S. nuclear artillery shells deployed in Europe. The President's move came in response to the dramatic changes in Europe and resulting opposition in the Congress to costly programs that made little sense in terms of the new political and military situation there. He called for a NATO summit conference to agree, among other things, on "broad objectives for future negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union on the current short-range nuclear missile forces in Europe, which should begin shortly after a CFE [Conventional Forces in Europe] treaty has been signed."

The London Declaration issued by NATO leaders at their summit meeting July 5-6, 1990 concluded that with eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces from their deployments in Eastern Europe, and implementation of an agreement reducing conventional armed forces in Europe, the Alliance would be able "to adopt a new NATO strategy making nuclear forces truly weapons of last resort."⁴ This shift in approach would alter NATO's long-standing flexible response doctrine in which the use of nuclear weapons could conceivably be authorized early in a military conflict. The summit declaration did not, however, forego the allied option of using nuclear weapons first in a conflict if necessary, and it left open the possibility that nuclear forces will be "kept up to date where necessary." The leaders nonetheless decided that NATO no longer would require all of its current inventory of short-range nuclear weapons consisting largely of nuclear artillery shells, bombs on dual-capable attack aircraft, and the obsolescent Lance missile system.

On September 27, 1991, following the failed attempt of hard line Communists to seize control in Moscow, President Bush announced a set of wide-ranging changes in U.S. nuclear policy and deployments. He decided to remove and destroy all U.S. land-based nuclear missiles from Europe and withdraw all U.S. sea-based tactical nuclear weapons while inviting the Soviet Union to take reciprocal actions. The President said that the United States should keep a nuclear capability for NATO, but at the same time he discontinued the program to develop the Short-

Range Attack Missile (SRAM-II) intended for deployment on strategic bombers. A tactical version of this system, the SRAM-T, intended for deployment in Europe, also was discontinued. This left the U.S. nuclear deployment in Europe limited to free-fall nuclear bombs on dual-capable ground attack aircraft.

The President's decisions were positively received throughout Europe and in the Soviet Union. On October 5, 1991, then-Soviet President Gorbachev announced his reciprocal intent to eliminate short-range ground-launched nuclear weapons and proposed U.S.-Soviet limitations on air-delivered tactical nuclear weapons as well. On October 17, 1991, the process of reducing such weapons was taken a step further when NATO Ministers of Defense meeting as the Nuclear Planning Group announced a 50% reduction in the inventory of some 1,400 free fall nuclear bombs deployed primarily by the United States in Europe.

From the 1991 "New Strategic Concept" to the "Alliance Strategic Concept" of 1999

The new NATO strategic concept approved by NATO leaders on November 7, 1991 in Rome declared that "the fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war." The Allies rejected adopting a "no first use posture," which had been advocated by some. The concept placed principal reliance on the strategic nuclear capabilities of the United States, France and the United Kingdom. But it also asserted that peacetime basing of nuclear forces on European territory (meaning the residual U.S. free-fall bombs) "provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance."⁵ Even as the leaders met to approve the new concept, however, the Soviet Union itself was breaking apart, raising new issues that allied officials had not been able to take into account in drafting the new strategy.

A main focus of NATO and U.S. concern since 1992 has been to ensure that the tactical and strategic nuclear forces of the former Soviet Union remained under reliable control. The United States and its allies sought to diminish the chances that the dissolution of the Soviet Union would result in nuclear proliferation, either

from a number of former republics retaining nuclear weapons or from the transfer of nuclear-weapons-making technology and know-how to other nations. By June 1992, all tactical nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union had been consolidated within Russia, where many of the warheads were scheduled for elimination. By June 1996, Ukraine and Kazakhstan had returned all their strategic warheads to Russia. Belarus did so by the end of 1996. Unfortunately, Russia has apparently not followed through with its destruction commitments and many of these warheads remain stored at sites in Russia.

With regard to the potential for European nuclear cooperation, early in 1992, various French officials suggested that French nuclear forces might some day be placed in the service of a unified European political and defense entity. French President François Mitterrand raised the issue by asking, "Is it possible to develop a European doctrine? That question will rapidly become one of the major considerations in the building of a common European defense."⁶ French officials and politicians subsequently answered Mitterrand's rhetorical question in a variety of ways, many of them supporting the idea of eventually dedicating French nuclear capabilities to the European Union. But France's European partners remained skeptical about the French willingness to make any real sacrifice of national sovereignty on behalf of European integration, and French nuclear strategy remained based on French national deterrence requirements. Nor did they want to encourage U.S. disengagement.

In other respects, NATO nuclear issues remained largely out of sight during 1993 and 1994. In 1995, they began to resurface in the context of the debate on NATO enlargement and as a consequence of French President Chirac's renewed offer of French nuclear capabilities on behalf of the European Union's defense.⁷

When the NATO defense ministers met in Brussels on June 13, 1996, they reiterated the fundamental purposes of NATO nuclear policy outlined in the new strategic concept. The communiqué also observed that NATO's nuclear forces have been

"substantially reduced" and, in a direct message to Moscow, the ministers declared that NATO's nuclear forces "are no longer targeted against anyone...." The ministers appeared to reinforce the point by noting that the readiness of NATO's dual-capable aircraft "has been recently adapted", presumably to a lower level of readiness to perform nuclear missions.⁸ This move, intended to reassure Moscow, suggests that the remaining U.S. nuclear-capable forces stationed in Europe are also less ready for possible use in a non-Russian scenario.

The ministers concluded the very brief statement on nuclear policy by expressing satisfaction that NATO's current nuclear posture will "for the foreseeable future, continue to meet the requirements of the Alliance." They then reaffirmed the strategic concept's conclusion that "nuclear forces continue to fulfill an indispensable and unique role in Alliance strategy" and emphasized that the remaining U.S. free-fall nuclear bombs for delivery by dual-capable aircraft were still essential to link the interests of the European and North American members of NATO.

In the 1999 Strategic Concept, the allies essentially reiterated their view that "The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war." They maintained that deploying nuclear weapons on the soil of several allied nations was an important demonstration of alliance solidarity. Finally, following another line taken consistently since 1991, the 1999 concept declared that sub-strategic forces based in Europe "provide an essential link with strategic nuclear forces, reinforcing the transatlantic link."⁹

Current Deployments of U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe

Reductions in the early 1990s brought U.S. nuclear deployments in Europe to very low levels, and the reduction process apparently has continued. By the mid-1990s, all U.S. nuclear weapons had been removed from Europe except for several hundred B-61 free-fall bombs.¹⁰ According to one unclassified source, approximately 150 bombs are still deployed at ten sites in seven European countries. The deployments reportedly

include weapons at three sites in Germany, two sites in Italy, and one site each in Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United Kingdom.¹¹ A portion of the U.S. submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile force also remains committed to NATO.¹²

Policy Issues

Notwithstanding consistent allied declarations concerning NATO strategy and the continued importance of U.S. sub-strategic weapons deployed in Europe, a number of questions may be posed. The most basic questions are whether a U.S. nuclear guarantee for European security is still essential and, if so, why, and how to implement that guarantee.

It is possible to argue that Russia for the foreseeable future will deploy strategic nuclear forces far superior to the French and British nuclear capabilities. Given continued uncertainties about the future of democracy in Russia, it is only prudent, according to this perspective, to sustain a U.S. nuclear guarantee for Europe and to deploy the nuclear and conventional forces that will make that guarantee credible. Others have argued that, in addition to uncertainties about Russia, potential security threats from North Africa and the Middle East warrant a continued U.S. nuclear contribution to NATO.¹³ Indeed, as early as 1991, NATO's New Strategic Concept noted that "the maintenance of a comprehensive in-place linear defensive posture in the central region will no longer be required [and that] geostrategic differences within the Alliance will have to be taken into account, including . . . in the southern region, the potential for instability and the military capabilities in the adjacent areas."

On the other hand, it can be argued that even an implicit U.S. nuclear threat against Russia is inconsistent with U.S. and Western attempts to support Russian reform and democracy, or that the French and British nuclear systems should be sufficient to deter any credible threats from a weakened Russia or elsewhere. In addition, even if it is deemed in the U.S. interest to extend deterrence to Europe against potential non-Russian military threats, there are questions about whether the United

States needs to deploy nuclear weapons in Europe to do so. And it remains unclear whether or not nuclear weapons have a significant deterrent effect on the behavior of non-nuclear rogue states in any case. It is also uncertain whether America's European allies would allow the United States to use its Europe-based weapons for any purpose other than deterrence or defense of the Alliance.

Even though the Soviet threat has vanished, some Europeans still worry about residual Russian nuclear forces and the potential for Germany at some point to become a nuclear power. The U.S. nuclear presence in Germany and the nuclear umbrella for the Germans have been seen as eliminating motivation for Germany to become a nuclear power. This raises several questions. Do other European allies still value the U.S. nuclear commitment for this purpose? Do the Germans still want some form of U.S. nuclear guarantee? Will France offer nuclear guarantees to its European partners, including Germany, as part of its commitment to the goal of European political union on terms that would be acceptable and as a new alternative to a German nuclear option? If so, would the Germans see a French guarantee as preferable to the U.S. commitment?

What Role for Residual U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe?

Questions remain whether a U.S. nuclear guarantee for Europe is warranted by current political and military conditions in Europe. The NATO countries continue to emphasize that collective defense, in which nuclear strategy played a key role, remains the core function of the Alliance. But the activities of U.S. forces stationed in Europe and of NATO forces more generally are concentrated on NATO's new "crisis management" missions. NATO is in the midst of a process of "adaptation," reorganizing itself to accommodate new missions and challenges, and the role of nuclear weapons and NATO nuclear planning might logically be seen as part of that reassessment.

Before the Warsaw Pact was disbanded and the Soviet Union dissolved, it was argued that the mere presence of some U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe played a role in deterring threats to the security of European NATO members. Now, however,

NATO cannot say who or what is being deterred. Even when there was a Soviet threat, many analysts believed that the U.S. commitment to extend nuclear deterrence to its European allies was made credible simply by the presence of U.S. military forces in Europe. Those force levels have been dramatically reduced. Other analysts have questioned whether the United States would be willing to use nuclear weapons to defend its European allies if it meant risking nuclear strikes on the American homeland.

What military role should free-fall bombs deployed in Europe play in NATO or U.S. strategy? NATO currently projects no imminent military threat against the territorial integrity or security of its members within the unrefueled range of the fighter bombers that would carry the free-fall bombs. Even in the extreme case of a newly antagonistic Russia, bombs would likely be the least credible component of any Western response to a Russian military threat. The fighter bombers currently available in Europe to deliver the bombs cannot reach targets in Russia and return without difficult air refueling arrangements. Other nuclear systems (such as the U.S. submarine-launched ballistic missiles still dedicated to NATO) have longer range and are more likely to survive defenses and arrive on target.

The apparent conclusion is that, from a military perspective, the bombs are largely intended as place-holders, presuming that withdrawal of the bombs could foreclose, or at least make politically more difficult, future U.S. deployment of any nuclear weapons in Europe. In addition, the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons on European soil both ensures continued nuclear risk sharing and affords European governments a consultative relationship with the United States concerning nuclear weapons strategy and doctrines.

Perhaps the most important rationale for a continuing U.S. nuclear presence in Europe is that virtually all European governments apparently still believe that the American military presence in Europe makes a significant contribution to European stability and peace. NATO's strategic concept asserts that the basing of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe provides "an essential political and military link between the European and the North

American members of the Alliance." But unless there is some credible military or deterrence role for these weapons, their "linking" power may be quite limited.

On the other hand, there has been no significant governmental or public opposition to this residual nuclear presence and it is possible that withdrawal would, over time, invite fundamental questions about the U.S. commitment. A survey by the Atlantic Council of the United States in the mid-1990s observed that "the overwhelming consensus among political leaders and strategic thinkers in Europe is that it is premature to address major changes in future nuclear force postures." The survey noted that "Europe has long depended on the American nuclear umbrella, and few European leaders want that to change."¹⁴ Nevertheless, the question of whether or not the deployment of free-fall nuclear bombs on European soil is essential to sustain extended deterrence remains open.

Nuclear Weapons and NATO Enlargement

The question of the U.S. nuclear commitment has become part of the debate on NATO enlargement. The NATO allies have told prospective candidates that the commitments they will receive as NATO members must be matched by their willingness to assume full responsibilities of membership. According to the NATO enlargement study released in September 1995, "New members will be full members of the Alliance, enjoying all the rights and assuming all the obligations under the Washington Treaty. There must be no 'second tier' security guarantees for members within the Alliance..."¹⁵ Furthermore, according to the study, "New members will be expected to support the concept of deterrence and the essential role nuclear weapons play in the Alliance's strategy of war prevention as set forth in the Strategic Concept;"¹⁶

In practice, and as declared in the NATO enlargement study, NATO has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons on the territory of any new member state. In fact, any plan to station NATO nuclear weapons forward in Central Europe would destroy NATO's attempt to demonstrate to Russia that enlargement is not contrary to Russian interests. The study

specifically notes that "[t]here is no *a priori* requirement for the stationing of nuclear weapons on the territory of new members." This is so because, according to the allies, "[i]n light of both the current international environment and the potential threats facing the Alliance, NATO's current nuclear posture will, for the foreseeable future, continue to meet the requirements of an enlarged Alliance."¹⁷

In the debate on enlargement, opponents have raised the familiar Cold War formulations that questioned whether the United States would ultimately be willing to risk nuclear strikes on American cities in the cause of defending German cities from Soviet attack. To some extent, this argument reflects residual Cold War threat assessments rather than current circumstances. Russia's present leaders and their main political opponents appear to have no desire to return to military confrontation with the West and, even if they did, they would find it difficult or impossible to do so with available military and financial resources. This, of course, could change in the long run, forcing NATO and the United States to re-examine their strategy, forces, and nuclear commitments.

The contemporary reality, however, is that NATO strategy and force deployments in response to the new threat environment have fundamentally altered the circumstances under which the United States would be making decisions on the use of nuclear weapons. As noted earlier, during the Cold War the strategy of flexible response combined with the forward deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons suggested that the United States would have to make nuclear use decisions early in any conflict. The nuclear umbrella therefore appeared likely to be forced open in the case of a Warsaw Pact attack (even though the process would have required requests for nuclear use through the NATO command structure and political decisions by the President of the United States to employ the weapons).

Today, the nuclear umbrella is much less "automatic."¹⁸ NATO strategy now suggests that "the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated by them... extremely remote." This is not quite the same as calling them

"weapons of last resort," as they did in 1991. But it surely means that the Alliance does not now contemplate circumstances in which the use of nuclear weapons would come early in a conflict. The fact that the United States has withdrawn most of its militarily significant nuclear weapons from their forward deployments in Europe means that, in a crisis, the old "use `em or lose `em" formula would no longer apply.

Although nuclear weapons remain a central part of NATO's deterrence strategy, they no longer are on the front lines in that strategy. One might speculate, however, that as all NATO countries reduce their non-nuclear forces, defense of an enlarged NATO against some future threat could actually become more dependent on nuclear deterrence than it was in the past.

Reassuring Russia

One of the most difficult policy issues confronting the process of enlarging NATO is the question of how to reassure Russia that a growing NATO does not diminish Russian security.¹⁹ The allies are faced with the difficult task of keeping their commitment to enlarge while avoiding a new confrontational relationship with Moscow. The issue is a very broad one that includes important political, psychological, security and economic dimensions. But one key element relates to nuclear weapons.

Russian officials have expressed particular concern that NATO enlargement could lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons on Russia's borders. This complaint could be dismissed as insincere to the extent that Russian defense officials and experts know that NATO has no nuclear-armed missiles or other nuclear weapons systems that it would want to deploy forward on European territory. As noted above, there are even questions about the continued need for the United States to deploy the several hundred free-fall bombs on West European territory. However, this information may be understood only among Russian defense specialists, and not by average citizens or even many political leaders.

The Russian concern is one that the NATO countries continue to take seriously. However, the nuclear issue did not become a

major question during the enlargement process that resulted in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joining NATO. It would not be a major question with regard to Slovenia and Slovakia, the two leading candidates for admission early in the 21st century. However, the nuclear question could become more prominent when and if NATO decides to invite one or more of the Baltic states to join the alliance—a step that Russia still strongly opposes.

At a minimum, the allies will continue to repeat their pledge to the Russians that, under current circumstances, the Alliance has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons on the soil of any new member states. Beyond this, it might be useful to expand cooperation beyond the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, whose agenda already includes a wide range of nuclear issues, by inviting Russia to participate in special sessions of the Nuclear Planning Group aimed at discussing nuclear non-proliferation, strategic stability, and related issues. In general, any measures to make the military aspects of the enlargement process more transparent could help mitigate legitimate Russian concerns.

The Role of British and French Nuclear Forces

Another important NATO nuclear issue is the role to be played by British and French nuclear forces. If Europe were sufficiently united to have common foreign and security policies, the French and British nuclear forces presumably would become instruments of those policies. In December 1991, the members of the European Community pledged at Maastricht, to take additional steps toward foreign policy and defense cooperation. The French and German governments have formed the Eurocorps (along with Belgium, Spain and Luxembourg) as the possible foundation for a future European military force.

In spite of the impressive scope of such commitments, however, the process of developing such cooperation may stretch out over many years, perhaps decades. The agreement among all the European Union members to create a rapid intervention force within the framework of a Common European Security and Defense Policy does not encompass nuclear weapons. Even

though France has become more willing to identify its nuclear deterrent forces as a contribution to European, rather than just French, defense, Paris has yet to make specific commitments to its non-nuclear European partners. French President Chirac renewed the French offer to extend nuclear deterrence to its European Union partners after the French government decided to resume nuclear testing in 1995.²⁰ Because the offer was made as part of the reaction to widespread European opposition to the French testing program, it was regarded cynically by most observers who saw the offer as simply designed to wrap the French testing decision in the protective garb of European unity.

A number of factors suggest that there are sufficiently substantial differences between the nuclear and non-nuclear EU member states as to make extensive European-level nuclear cooperation unlikely in the near future. In fact, until the European allies develop much closer foreign and defense cooperation, and perhaps even after they do so, some sort of U.S. nuclear link may still appear desirable for many European nations as a hedge against an uncertain Russian future. The link to the United States might seem even more critical to those allies who are not members of the European Union.

Until recently, the very different British and French positions in NATO appeared to constrain development of Franco-British nuclear cooperation. The U.K. still sees its force within the framework of the Alliance, and participates fully in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. French capabilities remain completely outside NATO. As France moves toward a more regularized relationship with NATO in other areas, NATO's adaptation process might lead to a closer French nuclear relationship with the Alliance. A revision of the role and functioning of the Nuclear Planning Group as part of a more general reform of NATO to adjust to new political and military realities could open the way for France to join with other allies in Nuclear Planning Group consultations.

Germany's Non-Nuclear Status

One of the major factors affecting attitudes toward NATO's nuclear strategy is the position of Germany. No government in

Europe wants Germany to become a nuclear weapons power. For the last four decades, the U.S. nuclear guarantee for Europe has served in lieu of a national German nuclear role. Germany apparently remains comfortable with the U.S. guarantee and has not sought a "European" replacement for it, in spite of past French suggestions that its nuclear force could serve as a nuclear umbrella for Germany. There is no indication that a united Germany has any desire to become a nuclear power and it has reasserted the pledge made earlier by the Federal Republic of Germany to abstain from production or possession of atomic, biological or chemical weapons.²¹

Many European governments support a continuing U.S. military presence and role in Europe in part to ensure that Germany will remain a non-nuclear power. European governments do not articulate this concern openly because they do not want to be seen as distrustful of Germany which has made significant constructive contributions to the Atlantic Alliance, as a leader for the process of European integration, and in relations with the East.

The Nuclear Commitment as a Source of U.S. Influence

Some observers suggest that one reason the United States may continue to offer extended deterrence to its NATO allies and keep some nuclear weapons in Europe is to maximize U.S. influence and its ability to advance its interests in relations with European nations. There is no way of proving that the United States derives influence as a result of its military commitment in Europe. It seems logical, however, to suggest that as long as European nations want the United States to make a contribution to military security in Europe, they will take U.S. interests and perspectives into account in their policy decisions. Whether or not the United States will derive influence based on the nuclear guarantee and a nuclear presence in Europe will therefore depend largely on how much European nations value this U.S. contribution to their security.

In the past, some U.S. critics of extended deterrence have argued that the United States risks much with the policy, without receiving meaningful benefits in return. Now, as long as U.S.

relations with Russia continue to develop essentially along cooperative lines, the risks inherent in a U.S. nuclear guarantee for NATO will be substantially lower than in the past. However, as noted above, the greatly reduced military threat to Europe also diminishes the necessity for and value of a U.S. nuclear commitment. Presumably, therefore, a nuclear commitment will yield less influence for the United States in the future than in the past.

Issues for the Future

If allied governments could avoid dealing with NATO nuclear strategy they probably would do so, given all the sensitive political issues raised in such an undertaking. But they may not be able to pursue an avoidance strategy in the context of debate on further NATO enlargement and in their efforts to increase European responsibilities in the Alliance.

It could be argued that the core of a new strategy already has been tentatively presented by NATO's suggestion in the early 1990s that nuclear weapons are weapons of "last resort." Such a strategy would have much popular appeal to the extent that it suggests a much-reduced reliance on nuclear weapons. But it might also have some unattractive aspects. For example, a "last resort" strategy could suggest to a potential aggressor that it had much leeway to make military advances with non-nuclear weapons before NATO would call on its nuclear weapons in response. In addition, it can be argued that nuclear weapons might be helpful in deterring rogue state employment of chemical or biological weapons

The allies therefore appear to face a basic question: should they replace flexible response with a strategy that limits the role of nuclear weapons to a "last resort", or should they develop a new approach that makes use of the potential deterrent value of nuclear weapons for threats short of a "last resort scenario? Such a strategy would leave open the possibility that the allies would respond to threats with defenses and weapons that are required to deter attacks at any level and defend against them if necessary. The main difference from flexible response would be that

nuclear weapons would not be woven into the fabric of conventional defense forces, and there would be a much wider gap between non-nuclear military options and nuclear options.

Developing any new strategy would require a serious and focused discussion among the allies, particularly among those who are nuclear weapons states. One task for the allies therefore is to find a way to expand nuclear consultations to include France in a way that would enhance the potential for the United States, Britain and France to work in concert when facing a military threat that might invoke the threat or use of nuclear forces.

This analysis gives rise to some central questions that might be asked relating to future U.S. defense strategy, nuclear policy, and NATO enlargement:

- What are the costs and benefits of maintaining a U.S. extended nuclear guarantee for its European allies?
- Is it necessary for the United States to deploy nuclear free-fall bombs, which are of questionable military utility, on European soil in order to maintain the credibility of the extended nuclear guarantee? Is such deployment useful to promote sharing of nuclear risks with allies?
- Does the further enlargement of NATO entail acceptable nuclear risks for the United States under current and foreseeable threat circumstances?
- What can or should the United States and the NATO allies do to try to reassure Russia that further NATO enlargement will not increase nuclear risks to Moscow?
- What are the costs and benefits of potential French participation in NATO nuclear consultations? Is there potential for a European nuclear deterrent within NATO that might obviate the need for the United States to station nuclear weapons in Europe?
- What changes in the structure and procedures of the Nuclear Planning Group might be required to involve France routinely in NPG work; or to include Russia in periodic NPG consultations?

NATO nuclear strategy *per se* is not generally seen to be an urgent issue for NATO or for the United States. But these questions suggest that some difficult issues of nuclear strategy and consultations may have to be addressed in the context of the dual processes of enlargement and adaptation of NATO that will continue well into this decade.

Endnotes

¹ The flexible response doctrine was set out in a document prepared by NATO's Military Committee, known as MC-14-3, and approved by the North Atlantic Council in December 1967.

² Article V of the April 4, 1949 North Atlantic Treaty founding document states that "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking, forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."

³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Special Meeting of Foreign and Defense Ministers Communiqué," December 12, 1979, as printed in *NATO Review*, February 1980, pp. 25-26.

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London on 5-6 July 1990," as printed in *NATO Review*, August 1990, pp. 32-33.

⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept, Agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Rome on 7-8 November 1991," printed in *NATO Review*, December 1991, pp. 25-32.

⁶ Mitterrand was speaking at a meeting in Paris on January 10, 1992, as reported by *Atlantic News*, No. 2387, January 14, 1992, p. 4.

⁷ Many Europeans looked skeptically on the French offer as an effort to deflect criticism of the France's nuclear testing program.

⁸ M-DPC/NPG 1(96)88, Meeting of the Defense Planning Committee in Ministerial Session, Brussels, 13 June 1996.

⁹ The Alliance's Strategic Concept, approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. 23-24 April 1999, NATO Press Release NAC-S(99)65.

¹⁰ See the description of these withdrawals in *Taking Stock, Worldwide Nuclear Deployments 1998* by William M. Arkin, Robert S. Norris and Joshua Handler (Washington, DC: Natural Resources Defense Council, March 1998), pp. 8-9, and a summary of current U.S. deployments on p. 24.

¹¹ British-American Security Information Council (Basic), "Nuclear Futures, Taking the Pulse: Fighter-Bomber Aircraft," found at <http://www.basicint.org/fighters.htm>, 2001.

¹² For more on these issues, see David S. Yost, "The US and Nuclear Deterrence in Europe," *Adelphi Paper 326* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 1999), and Bruno Tertrais, "Nuclear Policies in Europe," *Adelphi Paper 327*, March 1999.

¹³ The argument has been made, for example, by Thomas-Durell Young, who proposes that the United States, France and the U.K. cooperate to develop a tactical air-to-surface missile (a "tripartite TASM") to provide a "state-of-the-art" air-delivered nuclear capability for NATO countries. Thomas-Durell Young, "NATO's Substrategic Nuclear Forces and Strategy: Where Do We Go From Here?" Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, January 13, 1992.

¹⁴ "Nuclear Weapons and European Security," The Atlantic Council of the United States, Policy Paper, April 1996, p. 3.

¹⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Study on Enlargement," September 1995, Chapter 5, paragraph 68.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 45, d.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4, B, iv, paragraph 58.

¹⁸ Larry Chalmer, Director of the NATO Staff Officer Orientation Course at the U.S. National Defense University, has drawn the image out a little further, arguing that the nuclear umbrella, which was virtually automatic during the Cold War, has become more of a manual-opening umbrella in post-Cold War circumstances.

¹⁹ See David Yost's assessment of Russia's position in Chapter 9 of this volume.

²⁰ President Chirac announced on June 13, 1995 that France would conduct eight underground nuclear tests between September 1995 and May 1996 to ensure the security and reliability of its nuclear weapons and programs.

²¹ The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, known as the "2+4 treaty," was signed in Berlin in 1990. It reaffirmed

Germany's renunciation of the manufacture and possession of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as well as a united Germany's commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In addition, Germany agreed not to deploy nuclear weapons or foreign forces on that part of united Germany that used to be the German Democratic Republic.