



Arms Control Association (ACA)

British American Security Information Council (BASIC)

Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH)

Nuclear Policy Paper No. 7

April 2011

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NATO's Defense and Deterrence Posture

Review: A French Perspective on Nuclear Issues

The allied posture review, as called for by the heads of state and government at the Lisbon summit to implement the guidelines of the Strategic Concept, should bring about the strengthening of allied security. The review is not a disarmament review. On the contrary, the overall aim is to ensure that NATO's whole range of capabilities will be adapted to the prevailing security environment. This requires, first and foremost, addressing European conventional capability shortfalls and preserving the allied deterrent by reaffirming NATO's nuclear posture. Moreover, the legitimate commitment to disarmament should not confuse this message, which is crucial to our security, while other competent bodies are capable of advancing the disarmament agenda. In this context, it is also possible to seek the adaptation of nuclear weapons assigned to NATO to the strategic context. This paper will focus on nuclear issues, leaving aside for the purpose of that discussion the crucial question of conventional capabilities in Europe, and will dwell a little on Franco-German discussions – thus reflecting the author's current position.

On the eve of the Lisbon summit, a number of people announced that disputes would break out between France and Germany over the role of nuclear weapons in the alliance's strategy. In reality, a new Strategic Concept, NATO reform, the launching of a transition in Afghanistan, and the revival of NATO-Russia cooperation, including on anti-missile defense, were agreed to at the meeting. During the summit, the allied

heads of state and government also called for a "review" of NATO's posture in order to implement all the Strategic Concept guidelines on defense and deterrence.

Franco-German disputes: appearances and realities

A "pro-nuclear France," a "pro-disarmament" Germany: In the eyes of

many, the positions of Berlin and Paris are alleged to conflict irremediably. However, they can in fact be reconciled, as shown by NATO's new Strategic Concept. In Lisbon, all the allies reaffirmed the relevance of an allied nuclear deterrence. For its part, France fully supports the objective of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1887 to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, which is referred to in the new Strategic Concept. It should also be recalled that France has already adopted unparalleled disarmament measures by reducing the number of its nuclear warheads to 300 and irreversibly dismantling its land component, nuclear test sites, and fissile material production plants. France demonstrated its commitment through such concrete actions.

Germany and France share a priority objective: guaranteeing and enhancing allied security in an increasingly uncertain strategic environment. Uncertainties include, first and foremost, increasing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. This convergence of analysis finds very concrete expression of Franco-German cooperation in all nonproliferation areas, including, in response to the Iranian crisis (P5+1), as well as through operational cooperation in the framework of the Proliferation Security Initiative, joint promotion of the 2002 Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, implementation of new European Union actions on non-proliferation, and strengthening of the International Atomic Energy Agency. There is real convergence of views between France and Germany on these issues that are crucial to our security.

What should be NATO's role in disarmament?

For all the allies, disarmament is not a goal in itself but a means of strengthening our common security. Yet, in that area, the logic of exemplarity reaches its limit when it risks leading to unilateral disarmament without reciprocity and, hence, without a security gain. We should, therefore, make progress through negotiations with all concerned states in the appropriate frameworks. Tangible developments in disarmament take place on that basis, as shown by the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) negotiations between the United States and Russia. France is in favor of an approach to disarmament based on reciprocity of commitments and the inclusion of all relevant actors, which, in addition, helps to limit proliferation risks.

With this in mind, the allies' primary objectives are promoting ratification of the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, launching unconditional negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty within the United Nations Conference on Disarmament, and supporting bilateral disarmament agreements by Russia and the United States—which alone account for 90% of the world's nuclear arsenals. The entry into force of New START is an important contribution to this process. France and Germany are in agreement on these issues.

Yet NATO is not in a position to play a decisive role on its own in most of these issues. In particular, a standing committee on disarmament would only play a marginal or even counterproductive role in NATO. As its composition will be restricted to the allies, the committee will, consequently, be

unable to play a decisive role in relation to the above-mentioned disarmament and non-proliferation goals. At best, it will be a forum for in-house discussions without any concrete impact, while running the risk of creating artificial divisions among allies without any relevance to the real issues at stake. At worst, it will help promote the allies' unilateral disarmament measures to the detriment of their common security. In any event, it is likely, by sheer bureaucratic logic, to help promote a disarmament agenda exclusive of any other security consideration and without any relevance to deterrence and nonproliferation issues. Regarding the posture review, the allies have decided to set up a provisional committee tasked with making a contribution to disarmament issues. By the end of the review, the allies will need to determine whether or not it will be opportune to set up a standing committee.

Maintaining the alliance's nuclear deterrent

In this context, the specific role of NATO is to continue to guarantee the allied deterrent. In the face of threats to allied security—first and foremost from Iran—NATO must send unambiguous signals about our determination to confront them. The Strategic Concept clearly states that, as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. In a context where nuclear arsenals are increasing worldwide, NATO cannot reduce the effectiveness of its nuclear deterrent, which ought to remain a core element of the collective defense guarantees under Article 5. It remains crucial to many allies.

The alliance's public nuclear posture is a key component of its deterrence capability.

Insofar as deterrence is designed to influence the calculations of a potential adversary so as to deter any attack against our vital interests, it is essential to preserve a stable, unambivalent message. Any modification that would cloud our intentions and lead potential adversaries to have doubts about our determination would diminish NATO's deterrence capability and, hence, our security. For this reason, it is important to gauge the balance between support for the prospect of a world without nuclear weapons and the unambiguous reaffirmation of the allied nuclear deterrent.

In particular, this implies avoiding the impression of diminishing the role of nuclear deterrence in favour of a missile defense system. Nuclear deterrence is designed to deter any aggression against our vital interests. It is the final and irreplaceable assurance against any type of attack. Missile defense, for its part, is designed to counter a limited ballistic attack conducted with unsophisticated resources. These are two different logics that can complement one another yet can never substitute for the other. Stating the contrary would definitely risk jeopardizing the effectiveness of our deterrence and, hence, our security.

Regarding missile defense, what really needs to be addressed is a framework for realistic cooperation with Russia. This issue requires a very concrete definition of arrangements to enable cooperation between NATO and Moscow with due regard for the competencies of both parties. This first implies that we should avoid letting it be thought that it will bring about in-depth changes in the strategic equilibria. Affirming that anti-missile defense is a

substitute for nuclear weapons will not enable us to maintain favorable conditions for this discussion.

Adaptation of nuclear arsenals assigned to NATO

To implement the new strategic concept, the alliance will need to ensure that NATO's capabilities are adapted to the prevailing security environment. This will require in particular addressing the shortfalls in European conventional capabilities, developing a common missile defense policy and adapting nuclear arsenals assigned to NATO – in this order of priority.

Regarding the last issue, the aim should be to guarantee a principle of strict sufficiency by maintaining the number of weapons at the lowest level compatible with security conditions, following a thorough analysis of the latter. This topic should be discussed among allies in the framework of the strategic posture review, with contributions from the Nuclear Planning Group. Still, there are many outstanding questions: Should arsenals be modernized? Should the number of weapons be reduced? Should they be concentrated in one location? How can a dialogue on Russian tactical weapons be started? All of these questions should be tackled solely with an eye to increasing allied security. They require an in-depth and serious debate, without predetermination of the final outcome.

To seek to weaken the alliance's nuclear posture in order to advance the goal of modifying arsenals would mean addressing the problem the wrong way round. To retain its deterrent effectiveness, the allied nuclear posture should be as stable as possible. In the 1990s, NATO engaged in significant reductions of tactical arsenals without altering the foundations of the nuclear posture in the 1991 and 1999 Strategic Concepts. Initiating the adaptation of dedicated arsenals in no way requires altering the equilibrium of the posture defined by the 2010 Strategic Concept.

We should remember that most of the alliance's nuclear deterrence capability is still ensured by U.S. strategic arsenals with contributions from France and the United Kingdom's strategic arsenals. These elements are crucial to NATO's nuclear posture, which should remain compatible with the nuclear policy of each of its three nuclear-weapon-state allies. It is for this reason that NATO simply has a nuclear "posture" rather than, strictly speaking, a nuclear-weapons-use policy. Instead, it is the sole responsibility of the nuclear-weapon states to decide, at the last instance, on the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons. In particular, there can be no question of NATO committing itself on the issue of negative security assurances, which are unilateral legal acts adopted by nuclear-weapon states.

This paper is published under the joint ACA/BASIC/IFSH project on "Reducing the role of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe" funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. More information on the project can be found at <http://tacticalnuclearweapons.ifsh.de/>

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