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# Changing Nuclear Weapons Policy in the Trump Era

Implications for Europe

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The British American Security Information Council (BASIC) is a think tank based in Whitehall in London, taking a non-partisan, inclusive and dialogue-based approach to encourage stable global nuclear disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. The organization works to facilitate constructive engagement between siloed communities on traditionally sensitive or complex issues of nuclear policy, to create space for new and diverse perspectives to grow from those interactions. Over the 30 years since the organization was founded, in 1987, BASIC has developed institutional expertise across a number of transatlantic issue areas, including the UK-US nuclear relationship, the UK's Trident programme, the politics of disarmament and arms control in the UK Parliament, NATO nuclear weapons in Europe, the Middle East, the evolving role of responsibility in nuclear governance, and expanding technological threats to SSBN platforms.

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# Acronyms

ALCM - Air-launched Cruise Missiles

BMD - Ballistic Missile Defence

CTBT - Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

DDPR - Defence and Deterrence Posture Review

EPAA - European Phased Adaptive Approach

GLCM - Ground Launched Cruise Missiles

IAEA - International Atomic Energy Agency

ICBM - Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

IMS - International Monitoring System

INF Treaty - Intermediate-Range Nuclear-Forces Treaty

JCPoA - Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

LRSO - Long Range Standoff Weapon

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

New START - Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

NNSA - National Nuclear Security Administration

NPG - Nuclear Planning Group

NPR - Nuclear Posture Review

SLCM - Submarine Launched Cruise Missile

SVC - Special Verification Commission

TPNW - Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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# Executive Summary

This report examines the impact of US nuclear weapons policy for European NATO allies. It argues that President Trump's policy on nuclear weapons challenges strategic stability, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation within Europe. With President Trump promising to be a disruption to established interests and relationships; he is having a profound impact on US strategic relationships. As such Europeans need to take action to help shape a more responsible US nuclear weapons policy and create the conditions for a sustainable NATO-Russia security relationship that is cooperative rather than adversarial.

The report argues that President Trump is redefining US nuclear weapons policy at a time of heightened tension with Russia. To date his actions have worsened problems on a number of key strategic areas. There is a risk that the deteriorating US-Russia relationship could hold negotiations on existing and future arms control agreements hostage, to the detriment of European security. President Trump is presiding over a crisis of European arms control, having failed to coordinate a NATO response to Russia's alleged violation of the INF Treaty, signed 30 years ago on 8 December 1987, casting doubt on the future of New START and decertifying the Iran nuclear deal.

At the same time the United States is continuing its nuclear modernisation programme and contemplating whether or not to reintroduce new sub-strategic nuclear weapons systems. Given the current crisis in arms control, without carefully calibrated signalling to reassure Moscow this could be interpreted by Russia as an attempt to assert strategic dominance and re-establish nuclear warfighting capabilities. Of specific concern are upgrades to the US' existing B61 gravity bombs stationed in Europe which would appear to make these weapons more usable, and the emphasis on nuclear cruise missiles. Nuclear weapons which are designed to be used in escalation scenarios would increase the risk of conflict in Europe going nuclear and would likely provoke countermeasures from Russia.

The report continues to argue that these problems have been exacerbated by US signalling. President Trump has been deliberately ambiguous in his nuclear signalling, and simultaneously indicating the centrality of nuclear weapons to US diplomacy as a form of leverage. This both undermines NATO cohesion and makes negotiations with Russia more difficult, and raises the risk of a new type of nuclear insecurity emerging in Europe.

Because of these risks it is incumbent on European allies to take action. The report argues that, despite internal differences, European allies are uniquely positioned to influence the United States and shape Europe's security. While this report does not offer an exhaustive set of solutions to these problems, it makes a number of recommendations for Europeans.

- Establish a more holistic dialogue on arms control, that accounts for the linkage between strategic, sub-strategic weapon systems and ballistic missile defence. This may include urging the United States to convene the Special Verification Commission and sharing intelligence to help resolve the INF crisis, working on confidence building measures with Russia on BMD and pressing the United States and Russia to pursue strategic arms control.
- Consider how new US nuclear weapons systems contribute to or harm European security. Specifically new nuclear cruise missiles and forward-deployed B61-12 gravity bombs, and leverage the influence of the host-states as well as through the Nuclear Planning Group on these systems.
- Consider how NATO could improve its signalling with Russia and, whilst maintaining the need to deter Russia, develop an engagement strategy that gives Russia a greater stake in European security and stability in the longer term.



# Introduction

As President Trump redefines US nuclear weapons policy, Europe's security is complicated by deteriorating relations between NATO and Russia, a crisis in arms control and quickening nuclear modernisation. European NATO allies must take action.

Following his inauguration on 27 January President Trump announced that Washington would be conducting a Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) 'to ensure that the United States nuclear deterrent is modern, robust, flexible, resilient, ready, and appropriately tailored to deter 21st-century threats and reassure our allies.' This review, which is expected to be completed by early 2018, will make long-term decisions regarding the modernisation of the US nuclear deterrent. As such it will likely impact progress on non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament at a time of increasing nuclear uncertainty. President Trump is already signalling a different approach to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation; his call to 'greatly strengthen and expand [US] nuclear capability' contrast with his predecessor's call to 'reduce the role of nuclear weapons' in US strategy.<sup>1</sup>

President Trump's new approach to US nuclear policy could present new challenges to strategic stability, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation within Europe. He has cast doubt on two core principles of European security in the modern era: a decreased reliance on nuclear weapons to ensure security; and the acceptance of mutual vulnerability for strategic stability. The ambiguity surrounding US relations with Russia, ambiguous commitment to NATO and heated nuclear rhetoric at a time of heightened tension between NATO and Russia, enhance the possibility of conflict in Europe 'going nuclear.'

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1 David Smith, "Trump calls on US to 'greatly strengthen and expand' nuclear weapons capability," *Guardian*, December 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/22/donald-trump-tweets-expand-nuclear-weapons> and Barack Obama, *A World Without Nuclear Weapons*, Prague, April 5, 2009.



Nonetheless, with these new uncertainties and challenges there are also possible opportunities for the European allies to influence US nuclear policy and shape NATO's future approach to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. NATO is unique as the only alliance with highly institutionalised mechanisms of nuclear planning, deployment and sharing that give European allies some leverage over US nuclear policy with the purpose of strengthening pan-European security and collective understanding.

## What this report does:

This report analyses changing US nuclear policy from the perspective of the risks to European NATO allies, and how Europeans might use their agency to influence policy decisions in Washington. It identifies President Trump's new approach to nuclear weapons, assesses the risks inherent for European allies and offers possible policy areas for further exploration. European allies should consider the risks to NATO cohesion and to European security emanating from a changing US nuclear policy, and leverage their positions within NATO to shape a responsible US nuclear approach in Europe, one that minimises the unintended consequences of an increasing dependence on nuclear weapons. They should consider ways to stabilise the deteriorating NATO-Russia relationship and build a future relationship built more on cooperation than hostility.

This report identifies three core areas of concern:

- **Arms control and disarmament in Europe:** President Trump's approach, which arguably interprets arms control agreements with Russia as a constraint on US dominance, could endanger any possible hopes of rekindling arms control in Europe and could risk the advent of a nuclear arms race with Russia. Critically, the INF Treaty crisis, if unresolved, could endanger any future arms control agreements.
- **US nuclear modernisation:** President Trump appears to be proceeding with Obama's nuclear modernisation plans. Lacking careful signalling and coupled with current US debates on nuclear testing and sub-strategic weapon systems, this could increase Russian unease that the United States is seeking strategic dominance and nuclear warfighting capabilities. If so, this would undermine strategic stability with Russia, and Europe's security.
- **New nuclear signalling:** US nuclear signalling on an international level, with European allies and with Russia is ambiguous. This undermines international and collective efforts on promoting nuclear non-proliferation, alliance cohesion and strategic stability with Russia.

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President Trump has cast doubt on two core principles of European security in the modern era: a decreased reliance on nuclear weapons to ensure security; and the acceptance of mutual vulnerability for strategic stability.

# Background

US-Russia and NATO-Russia relations have deteriorated significantly over the last decade, following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the continuing conflict in Ukraine, tensions in Syria, NATO's military deployments in Eastern Europe, and recent election interference. At the heart of this worsening relationship is a threat perception rooted in Russia's distrust of, and confrontational attitude towards, the Alliance and NATO's failure to understand Russian security concerns. In contrast NATO considers its deterrence posture as proportionate in the face of a resurgent and revanchist Russia and the acute vulnerability of Eastern European allies. Against this backdrop there is a fear that low-level conflict in Eastern Europe could rapidly escalate into a nuclear conflagration in light of the large arsenals of strategic and sub-strategic nuclear weapons and the ambiguous role of these weapons within the security doctrines on both sides.<sup>2</sup>

Some argue that current nuclear tensions have surpassed that of the Cold War. Mikhail Gorbachev has warned that an arms race is now 'in full swing.' However simple comparisons to the Cold War mask the complexity of today's European security dilemma. Nuclear threats in the 21st century are intersecting with a range of emerging technologies and nuclear weapons are now being considered for 'limited' use in ways that challenge Cold War deterrence thinking.<sup>3</sup>

The lack of trust and deteriorating security relationship between the West and Russia have been exacerbated by the election of President Trump, despite his warm overtures to President Putin. His foreign policy to date is unclear at best. He has sent contradictory messages to European allies over the US commitment to the Alliance and has lambasted Europeans for not spending enough defence. Meanwhile, he has indicated a desire to pursue a grand strategic bargain with Russia, prompting concern among some Europeans. In practice, however, President Trump's negotiating hand is tied due to domestic constraints including the ongoing inquiry into links between Russian officials and his election campaign, as well as Congressional opposition.

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## Nuclear threats in the 21st century are intersecting with a range of emerging technologies challenging Cold War deterrence thinking.

Relations between the United States and Russia have deteriorated on a number of strategic issues – notably arms control. While Russian willingness to engage in high-risk action and reliance on nuclear weapons pre-date President Trump's inauguration, his response has arguably worsened this situation. He has cast doubt on the future of New START; failed to coordinate a NATO response to Russia's alleged violation of the INF Treaty; and has decertified the JCPoA. US military officials and members of Congress increasingly refer to Russia as a competitor or

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2 Lizzie Dearden, "Mikhail Gorbachev warns of new Cold War with US-Russia arms race 'in full swing'," *Independent*, April 18, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/mikhail-gorbachev-new-cold-war-us-russia-arms-race-full-swing-soviet-premier-putin-trump-north-korea-a7688321.html>

3 Anthony Juarez, "Rethinking Deterrence and Assurance: Western Deterrence Strategies: at an Inflection Point," *NATO Defense College Conference Report* 4 no. 17 (2017): 3.

adversary and view tension in Europe as, 'the greatest challenge we've had since the end of the Cold War,' making any cooperative relationship difficult.<sup>4</sup>

President Trump's actions have aggravated relations with European allies and Russia alike. The Administration's efforts to allay concerns by European allies or Russia have been undermined by mixed messaging. Diverging European and US opinion on key strategic issues could affect the broader transatlantic relationship. This may affect how the Alliance will function in the future. Therefore changing US nuclear weapons policy will profoundly affect NATO's nuclear weapons policy and will have implications for the security of European allies and Russia.

## What are European allies' strengths?

NATO's consensual decision making ensures that NATO members are in constant dialogue and provides a relatively open forum for European partners to voice concerns.

NATO has a long history of strategically adapting at critical junctions to changes in European security.

NATO has integrated arms control and non-proliferation into its Strategic Concept, and has a history of reducing the Alliance's reliance on, and number of, nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War.

European allies have assumed diplomatic leadership on non-proliferation and arms control efforts outside of NATO, most notably over the Iran nuclear deal (JCPoA).

European allies have served as a broker between Russia and the United States during times of heightened tension.

The UK and France are uniquely positioned to discuss nuclear issues with the United States, especially the UK due to its nuclear cooperation with the United States.

The United States must get agreement from European host states and NATO for any European deployments of proposed nuclear weapon systems.

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4 Adam Smith, "Military Assessment of Russian Activities and Security Challenges in Europe," filmed March 2017 at US Committee on Armed Services <https://armedservices.house.gov/legislation/hearings/military-assessment-russian-activities-and-security-challenges-europe>

# Arms Control and Disarmament

President Trump has indicated an ambivalence to resolving and restoring faith in current arms control treaties and has shown little desire to conclude any future arms control agreements restricting new weapons systems that will negatively impact Europe.

## INF Treaty Violation

On 8 March 2017 US Strategic Command confirmed that it believed Russia had violated the 'spirit and intent' of the INF Treaty after a New York Times article the previous month reported that Russia had deployed a new nuclear-capable ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM).<sup>5</sup> The supposed missile in violation is the SSC-8, a new GLCM variant of the Russian Iskander family of ground-launched ballistic missile systems.<sup>6</sup> President Trump subsequently said that the violation would make any strategic understanding with Russia 'harder to achieve,' while Russia fiercely denied the accusations and hit back with counter-accusations.<sup>7</sup>

The INF Treaty bans the possession, production and flight testing of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCM) and ballistic missiles with a range of 500 km to 5,500 km. Signed 30 years ago on 8 December 1987, the ground-breaking treaty is notable for banning an entire category of weapons deployed by the United States and Russia and for being the first nuclear arms control treaty to impose intrusive monitoring and verification methods, as well as imposing asymmetric reductions. Its demise could symbolise a new age of nuclear tension in Europe by setting off a domino effect in disrupting strategic arms control for the foreseeable future, impacting the likelihood of negotiating a New START successor treaty or any other new arms control agreements.

Russian unease with the INF Treaty has been growing since the mid-2000s. In 2007, then Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov questioned the Treaty on the basis that it applied only to the United States and Russia, but not to other countries deploying similar technologies.<sup>8</sup> Russia sees the Treaty as particularly burdensome, partly because it does not limit air-launched (ALCM) or sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCM). The United States could use nuclear-tipped cruise-missiles against Russia from aircraft in Western Europe and from submarines in the Baltic and Mediterranean. And the treaty constrains all Russian deployments, including those outside the European theatre. Since the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, Russia has lost its strategic buffer and forward-deployment bases and increasingly places value in asymmetric strike capabilities. Similarly, Russia has warned since 2015 that upgrades to US sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe (the free-fall B61-12s delivered by dual-capable NATO allied aircraft) would

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5 Michael Gordon, "Russia Deploys Missile, Violating Treaty and Challenging Trump," *New York Times*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/14/world/europe/russia-cruise-missile-arms-control-treaty.html>, and Robert Burns, "US general says Russia has deployed banned missile," *Defence News*, March 8, 2017, <http://www.defensenews.com/space/2017/03/08/us-general-says-russia-has-deployed-banned-missile/>

6 For a discussion of the SSC-8 and accusation of violation see Hans M. Kristensen, "NASIC Removes Russian INF-Violating Missile From Report," August 22, 2017.

7 "Highlights of Reuters interview with Trump," *Reuters*, February 23, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-interview-highlights-idUSKBN1622RG>

8 Ulrich Kuhn and Anna Peczeli, "Russia, NATO, and the INF Treaty," *Strategic Studies Quarterly Spring* (2017): 66-99.

have to be met with countermeasures. Some analysts have suggested this could imply developing nuclear capable versions of the Iskander class systems.<sup>9</sup> Any Russian deployment could be an attempt to force discussions about the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), NATO's anti-ballistic missile system that Russia alleges violates the Treaty and will threaten Russia's strategic forces over the long term.

The Trump administration's response to the violation is notable for two reasons. First, many of the responses being debated in the US Congress have jumped to military responses or potentially abrogating the Treaty. These include developing and deploying US GLCMs and a new cruise missile defence system in Europe, or supplying European allies with JASSM-ER and Tomahawk missiles. Following the allegations, a Congressional hearing requested on 28 March 2017 that Strategic Command present proposals for responding to the violation. Other than confirm that responding to the alleged INF violation will form a core component of the NPR, the Department of Defence has not submitted any public proposals.<sup>10</sup> Revealingly, in response to President Trump's budget request the House Armed Service Committee requested an extra \$65 million to be appropriated, 'for a research and development program on a ground-launched intermediate-range missile in order to begin to close the capability gap opened by the Russian violation of the INF Treaty.'<sup>11</sup> The compromise bill between the House and Senate will authorise \$58 million for new defence measures, 'counterforce capabilities' and 'countervailing strike capabilities' to respond to Russia as well as to mandate the research and development of a US GLCM and a feasibility study to convert existing US systems into GLCM.<sup>12</sup>

Second, consultation with Europe and NATO cohesion on the issue is lacking. Since the violation, the United States has informed allies of the violation and expected their support, but NATO has declined to comment on whether it believes Russia is in violation. Instead, Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, has stressed the bilateral nature of the INF Treaty.<sup>13</sup> It appears that the United States did not immediately share its intelligence with allies: it certainly had not done so by the end of March 2017.<sup>14</sup> Only in mid-April, two and half months after the original allegations, did it confirm that it was 'consulting with allies to review a range of appropriate options should Russia persist in its violation' and that any response would ensure that 'Russian security will not be enhanced by continuing its violation', indicating a potential military response.<sup>15</sup> While the United States refuses to make the intelligence public, it is difficult for allies to discern what action is necessary and easy for Russia to deny any allegations.

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9 "Russia's 'New Efficient Solutions' to Counter Washington's Upgraded B61-12 Nuke," *Sputnik News*, August 2, 2017, and "Russia Warns of 'Strong Response' to US Nukes in Germany," *Sputnik News*, September 24, 2017.

10 "Military Assessment of Russian Activities and Security Challenges in Europe," Committee on Armed Services, March 28, 2017.

11 "National Defence Authorisation Act for Fiscal Year 2018," *House Armed Services Committee*, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FY18%20NDAA%20summary2.pdf>

12 "Section 1243," *National Defence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018*, US Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text#toc-H6DCC526BF326469EB85FD2D5623C1D7D>

13 Jens Stoltenberg, "Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of meetings of NATO Foreign Ministers and after a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council," NATO, March 30, 2017, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_142782.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_142782.htm), and "Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Defence Ministers." NATO, November 8, 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_148417.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_148417.htm)

14 "2017 Report on Adherence to and Compliance With Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments," *US Department of State*, April 14, 2017, [https://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2017/270330.htm#INF\\_TREATY](https://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/rpt/2017/270330.htm#INF_TREATY)

15 "Consequence and Context of Russia's Violation of the INF Treaty," House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, March 30, 2017.

## So what are the risks of the alleged violation?

The SSC-8's range of 3,400 km would put European cities and military installations at risk. However, as Ulrich Kuhn and Anna Peczeli have noted, the limited deployment of even 50 to 100 of these missiles in the near future 'would not immediately alter the overall military balance between NATO and Russia, given the general conventional superiority of NATO.'<sup>16</sup> Even General Selva, Vice Chairman of the Chief of Staff, admitted that 'given the location of the specific missiles and deployment, they don't gain any advantage in Europe.'<sup>17</sup> Its additional military contribution to Russia's sub-strategic nuclear arsenals is negligible; in the event of a nuclear war, the distinction between different systems would likely become meaningless.

The greater risk is that this limited violation could lead to a breakdown of the Treaty and of confidence within the United States about any future arms control with Russia. It could also trigger further deployments of nuclear and conventional weapons systems that would continue to worsen relations with Russia and contribute to a nuclear arms race. Critically, it would be difficult to negotiate any future arms control agreements without resolving the underlying conditions that may have prompted the alleged violation – unhappiness with European ballistic missile defence (BMD) and a perception of NATO encroachment and superior capabilities.

Discussions over the response to the INF Treaty could undermine Alliance cohesion. Many of the debated US military deployments would have to be in Europe, and given Europe's muted response it is uncertain which European NATO ally would agree to host these. It is deeply unlikely that Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands or Turkey, the countries which currently host US forward-based nuclear weapons, would willingly accept the deployment of nuclear cruise missiles. This would evoke memories of the discussions over the deployment of Pershing II missiles and GLCMs to Europe in the 1980s, a source of particular protest. Any proposals to host such missiles in other countries, such as in Eastern Europe, would severely strain Alliance cohesion and relations with Russia. Moreover it would violate the pledge within the NATO-Russia Founding Act where NATO pledges, 'no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.' Similarly, attempts to bolster of NATO's missile defences would further exacerbate tensions with Russia as it would enhance concerns over NATO's military superiority.

Europeans will need to consider their responses given the potential impacts on European security. If the Russian violation is as serious as the United States alleges, European allies will need to access the new intelligence to determine how best to respond. If this does not happen, Europeans will be in a difficult position; politically it is neither desirable to side with the new administration which has openly criticised the alliance, nor to ignore any violation. Europeans should urge both sides to discuss compliance via the Special Verification Commission (SVC). In November 2017, the Washington Post reported that the United States had called for another meeting of the SVC, but it is unclear whether this will progress.<sup>18</sup> Since 1987 the SVC has met 30 times to discuss a range of compliance issues, most recently in November 2016. Given that the alleged deployment violation grew from the previous accusations of violations of development and flight testing, convening the SVC to deal with this specific accusation is the natural first step for the new administration to seek a diplomatic resolution. Alternatively, Europeans could propose independent confidence-building measures with Russia. For example, Russia could be allowed to inspect EPAA facilities in return for inspections of Russian facilities, or Europeans could propose adjustments to increase Russian confidence that BMD could not be repurposed. This could open up a more comprehensive transatlantic discussion about different possible ways forward, which at present appears to be lacking. It may also give Moscow reasons to retain an interest in diplomatic solutions.

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16 Kuhn and Peczeli, "Russia, NATO, and the INF Treaty."

17 Wilson Brissett, "US Can Respond to Russian Violations Without Breaking INF Treaty," *AirForce Magazine*, March 19, 2017.

18 Josh Rogin, "Russia has deployed a banned nuclear missile. Now the U.S. threatens to build one," *Washington Post*, November 16, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/11/16/russia-has-deployed-a-banned-nuclear-missile-now-the-u-s-threatens-to-build-one/?utm\\_term=.2ef03f1d99df](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/11/16/russia-has-deployed-a-banned-nuclear-missile-now-the-u-s-threatens-to-build-one/?utm_term=.2ef03f1d99df)

## The Problem of the EPAA and BMD in Europe

Russian opposition to BMD in Europe stems from two principal fears: firstly, that the EPAA's MK-41 launchers in Romania and Poland - deployed to defend against missile attacks - could also be used to launch ground-based nuclear cruise missiles banned under the INF Treaty. The MK-41 launchers were originally designed to fire ground-attack Tomahawk cruise missiles. Secondly, Russia worries about the possible mid- to long-term consequences of the programme, fearing that it could involve the scaling up the deployment of this technology in a way that renders Russian strategic missiles redundant. As President Putin summarised in 2016,

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'A missile defence system is one element of the whole system of offensive military potential. It works as part of a whole that includes offensive missile launchers. One complex blocks, the other launches high precision weapons, the third blocks a potential nuclear strike, and the fourth sends out its own nuclear weapon in response. This is all designed to be part of one system.'<sup>19</sup>

Specifically, Russia fears that the system could help the United States develop a nuclear first strike capability for offensive military action, its officials warning, 'the anti-missile umbrella may increase the illusion of invulnerability and impunity and lead to temptation of taking unilateral steps in the resolution of global and regional problems, including the reduction of threshold of nuclear weapons use.'<sup>20</sup>

NATO insist the EPAA 'is not oriented against Russia nor does it have the capability to undermine Russia's strategic deterrent.'<sup>21</sup> But the EPAA was launched in response to Iran's nascent ballistic missile programme and its continuation following the successful conclusion of the JCPoA has raised questions about its real purpose. While it would be difficult for NATO to scale up the EPAA to deliver the capability that President Putin was referring to, not least because this would prove divisive for the Alliance, this argument does little to counter the heightened Russian unease.

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19 Vladimir Putin, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, June 2016, quoted in Hans M. Kristensen and Postol, "How US nuclear force modernization is undermining strategic stability."

20 Tom O'Connor, "Russian Officials say U.S. Global Missile Defense could lead to nuclear war in Europe," *Newsweek*, October 27, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-us-global-missile-defense-lead-nuclear-war-europe-591244>

21 "Defence and Deterrence Posture Review," NATO, 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_87597.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm)





## Is this trend continuing under President Trump?

Parallel to the NPR, and inseparable from the modernisation of the US nuclear arsenal, the United States is conducting a Ballistic Missile Defence Review to 'evaluate threats posed by ballistic missiles and develop a missile defence posture for current and future challenges.' This could accelerate BMD programmes that prove controversial for Russia. For example, David Trachtenberg, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Policy at the Department of Defense, commented that 'continued American vulnerability to Russian nuclear missiles is unacceptable,' and in December 2016 Congress approved an expanded role for BMD by revising the 1999 law delineating its 'limited' purpose.<sup>22</sup> The United States has already increased deployments of homeland BMD, and is deploying the third stage of the EPAA to Poland despite Russian opposition.

Mutual understanding on BMD will be necessary for a shared NATO - Russia consensus on security in Europe, strategic stability and nuclear arms control. Refusal to talk on this issue could lock Russia and NATO into a dangerous and expensive path of security competition and an arms race. NATO needs to account for the signalling and implications that progressing with the EPAA has for strategic stability and arms control with Russia and for building a more cooperative relationship.

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22 Kingston Reif, 'Missile Defense Review Begins,' *Arms Control Association*, May 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-05/news/missile-defense-review-begins>



## New START

In January 2017 during a phone call, President Trump was reported to have rebuffed President Putin's offer to extend New START, which mutually limits Russian and US deployment of strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 and deployed delivery systems to 700, by five years from 2021.<sup>23</sup> In February, he labelled the Treaty a 'one-sided deal' and in a later interview claimed the United States, 'had fallen behind on nuclear weapons capacity.'<sup>24</sup> This follows his campaign claims that Russia had 'outsmarted' the United States with New START.<sup>25</sup>

It is unlikely that the United States will abrogate New START before it expires, but negotiations on its extension or a follow-on need to start sooner rather than later if they are to have a chance of completing in time. On 18 July, following the initial meeting between Presidents Putin and Trump, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon met in Geneva to launch 'Strategic Stability Talks.' Both sides stated that they will 'continue to implement the New START Treaty in a pragmatic way.'<sup>26</sup> More recently, talks were held in Helsinki on 11 and 12 September to continue discussions on the technical aspects of implementation. The latest data suggest that both Russia and the United States are on track to meet New START's limits by February 2018.<sup>27</sup>

There is, however, a risk that the political will to negotiate a successor treaty or agree to New START's extension will be lacking. The deteriorating US-Russia relationship could hold negotiations hostage; Russia could hold out for progress on strategic arms control, BMD or conventional weapons systems while the United States could hold out for INF Treaty compliance and progress on sub-strategic nuclear weapons generally. Indeed, Chris Ford, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for WMD and Counterproliferation, indicated that it would be difficult to have future discussions on strategic weapons reductions, given the low level of trust following the INF Treaty violation.<sup>28</sup> If a decision were taken not to negotiate a successor treaty or negotiations were unsuccessful, Europe would be trapped in the middle of a new nuclear arms race.

As such, it is important that Europeans promote the importance of the extension of New START and the negotiation of a successor treaty, despite the US-Russia concerns surrounding the INF Treaty and the issue of sub-strategic nuclear weapons. They should engage US policy-makers, and could use the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), to stimulate discussion on the number of nuclear weapons needed to ensure strategic stability in Europe, as opposed to punishing Russia or forcing competition. In 2013, the United States noted that it could reduce its nuclear warheads one third below New START and still meet its deterrence requirements. This number would likely be much less if there were a mutual agreement with Russia and some have suggested pursuing a 'New START II' limiting deployed warheads to 750 each.<sup>29</sup> European allies should impress upon the United States the benefits of such a treaty for European security, for preventing Russian proliferation and for transparency. This will not be an easy task and it is

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23 Jonathan Landey and David Rohde, "Exclusive: In call with Putin, Trump denounced Obama-era nuclear arms treaty - sources," *Reuters*, February 9, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-putin/exclusive-in-call-with-putin-trump-denounced-obama-era-nuclear-arms-treaty-sources-idUSKBN15O2A5>

24 "Highlights of Reuters interview with Trump," *Reuters*, February 23, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-interview-highlights-idUSKBN1622RG>

25 Landey and Rohde, "Exclusive: In call with Putin."

26 "Under Secretary Shannon's Meeting With Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov," US Department of State, July 18, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/07/272652.htm>

27 Hans M. Kristensen. "New START Data: Russia Slashes Deployed Warheads, US Reaches Limits," *Federation of American Scientists*, October 2, 2017, <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2017/10/new-start2017-2/>

28 Chris Ford, at Arms Control Association's Annual Meeting, June 2, 2017, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?429395-4/trump-administration-nuclear-weapons-strategies&start=1509>

29 James E. Doyle, "OPLAN 2045: Preparing for nuclear disarmament," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 28, 2016, <http://thebulletin.org/oplan-2045-preparing-nuclear-disarmament10189>

important that Europeans consider ways to pressure both Washington and Russia to see the value of strategic arms control, especially during times of heightened tension.

## Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

While not a nuclear arms control agreement in Europe per se, the Iran nuclear deal has been key to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to Europe's periphery. On 13 October President Trump decided not to recertify the Iran Deal, despite his own administration and the IAEA certifying that Iran is in compliance.<sup>30</sup> Congress must decide whether to re-impose sanctions, amend its relationship to the deal or the need for continuous Presidential recertification, or demand a renegotiation. European nations, Russia and China, however, have indicated they have no desire to reopen negotiations.

President Trump's hostility towards the Iran nuclear deal could spark a new international crisis, backtrack on years of diplomacy, and have wide reaching repercussions for non-proliferation. The issue presents a particular point of discord between the United States and European allies, given European leadership on securing the agreement, and has generated more concerted European lobbying attention in Washington than any previous nuclear issue for at least a decade.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, NATO hailed the deal as a 'historic breakthrough' and has a number of core interests in continued compliance. Any emerging missile threat emanating from Iran impacts Europeans first and foremost.<sup>32</sup> A breakdown in the deal that leads Iran to expand its enrichment and missile programmes might also strengthen European backing for BMD, complicating other arms control processes.

If the United States came to be seen as responsible for the breakdown of the deal, and for deeply harming European security, it could lead to a larger diplomatic crisis between Europe and the United States. As former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt notes, '[Europe] has absolutely zero appetite for a new cascade of conflicts in a region on its doorstep.'<sup>33</sup> If European companies were targeted by secondary sanctions as sanctions snapped back, this could exacerbate trade disputes.<sup>34</sup> Europeans should consider how this issue could affect broader transatlantic relations and could make future non-proliferation and arms control agreements more difficult.

## Arms control agreements on future technologies and nuclear risks

Beyond existing arms control agreements, the NATO-Russia deterrence relationship has been increasingly complicated by new and emerging weapon systems: cyber capabilities; autonomous platforms; hypersonic glide vehicles; and improved delivery platforms all affect the risk of any conflict 'going nuclear.' These systems have the ability to collapse the battle-space and increase the fog of war, while simultaneously making nuclear weapons appear

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30 "Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015)," IAEA, September 2017, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2017-35.pdf>

31 Patricia Zengerle, "Exclusive: European envoys take fight for Iran nuclear deal to U.S. Congress," *Reuters*, October, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-congress/exclusive-european-envoys-take-fight-for-iran-nuclear-deal-to-u-s-congress-idUSKBN1C930U>

32 Tytti Erästö, "Between the Shield and the Sword: NATO's Overlooked Missile Defense Dilemma," *Ploughshares Fund*, June 2017.

33 Carl Bildt, "If Trump blows up the Iran deal, he'll cause a meltdown in Europe, too," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/08/01/if-trump-blows-up-the-iran-deal-hell-cause-a-meltdown-in-europe-too/?utm\\_term=.0ad233444ec2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/08/01/if-trump-blows-up-the-iran-deal-hell-cause-a-meltdown-in-europe-too/?utm_term=.0ad233444ec2)

34 Paulina Izwicz, "Iran deal decertification looms: what's next?," *IISS*, October, 2017, <http://www.iiss.org/en/iiss%20voices/blogsections/iiss-voices-2017-adeb/october-1537/iran-deal-certification-d124>



## Is Europe itself divided?

The views and leverage of European allies in NATO on arms control and nuclear modernisation are far from monolithic. Many Eastern European allies feel a heightened sense of insecurity stemming from the threat of Russia. Leading voices in Warsaw, and more recently some in Berlin, have advocated a more robust European nuclear deterrent and even an independent European nuclear deterrent.<sup>35</sup> Romania and Poland may be more willing than Western European allies to consider extreme countermeasures such as converting MK-41 launchers to fire GLCMs and even consider nuclear forward-basing. Such views are profoundly at odds with the thinking of current nuclear host states who remain sensitive to the continuing role of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in NATO strategy. In particular Turkey, which continues to rank as a host country for B61 gravity bombs and has clashed politically with Europeans on a range of issues, complicates alliance dynamics, especially in the debates on the role of US extended deterrence and BMD for the Alliance.

All this underscores NATO's difficulty in considering policy options. Europeans have to wrestle not only with transatlantic dynamics but with intra-European dynamics as well. One of Europe's greatest strengths in shaping US policy, NATO's consensual decision-making, can also be its greatest weakness. Managing such a range of perspectives risks lowest common denominator decision making and inaction.

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35 Max Fisher, "Fearing U.S. Withdrawal, Europe Considers Its Own Nuclear Deterrent," *New York Times*, March 6, 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/world/europe/european-union-nuclear-weapons.html>

less reliable as a strategic deterrent.<sup>36</sup> These technologies increase instabilities in low-level crises and the chance of asymmetric escalation. Furthermore these escalation pathways are more complex and currently poorly understood. Yet discussions on future arms control agreements to control and limit these technologies are underdeveloped, the most common assumption being that they are simply too difficult.

With the current level of distrust between the United States and Russia, the uncertain future of the INF Treaty and New START, combined with the potential complications of the JCPoA for future negotiations on BMD, it is unclear whether any concerted effort to create new arms control agreements on emerging technology would be spearheaded by either the United States or Russia. Yet many of the insecurities they bring are unique to the action-reaction cycles, escalation dynamics and risks of hybrid warfare on NATO's eastern border.

More research is needed into how NATO and Russian vulnerabilities to new technologies overlap. There may also be a need to establish new approaches to arms control in general. While previous treaties have focused on specific military capabilities in isolation, the proliferation of technologies that intersect and can affect strategic level thinking undermines arms control by number limitations and verification. As shown, this is already a recurring problem with existing technologies; it is difficult to discuss strategic and sub-strategic nuclear systems as well as BMD, conventional capabilities and emerging technologies in isolation from each other. European allies may identify possible areas or approaches to future arms control agreements on emerging technologies. However without resolving compliance issues with the INF Treaty, securing follow-on agreements to New START and negotiating agreements on new systems will likely be impossible. New integrated approaches will be needed that allow both progress on systems in isolation but do not preclude wider discussions.

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**Without resolving compliance issues with the INF Treaty, securing follow-on agreements to New START and negotiating agreements on new systems will likely be impossible.**

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36 John Borrie, Tim Caughley and Wilfred Wan (eds.) *Understanding Nuclear Weapons Risks* (Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2017).





# US Nuclear Modernisation

President Trump is continuing US nuclear modernisation started under the Obama Administration. This will make the US arsenal more usable in sub-strategic scenarios, especially if combined with additional systems under debate. Given the current crisis in arms control this could be interpreted by Russia as an attempt to assert strategic dominance and re-establish nuclear warfighting capabilities, and could provoke a hostile response.

President Trump has indicated that the modernisation of the US nuclear arsenal is central to an 'America First' foreign policy. He has presented a narrative of US military atrophy, pledged to make the United States 'top of the pack' when it comes to nuclear weapons and sought to take credit for the modernisation plans of the previous administration. The current modernisation programme is the largest since the early Reagan era, and is estimated to cost between \$1.2bn and \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years, before accounting for any additional changes.<sup>37</sup> This was initiated by President Obama in 2010, its scale at the time a trade-off for Congressional approval for New START, and commits the

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37 Approaches for Managing the Costs of U.S. nuclear Forces, 2017 to 2046, US Congressional Budget Office, October, 2017 and "The Trillion (and a Half) Dollar Triad?" *Arms Control Association* 9, no. 6, August 18, 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/issue-briefs/2017-08/trillion-half-dollar-triad>

United States to modernising all three legs of the triad – the land-based missiles (ICBM), ballistic missile submarines (SLBM), and nuclear bombers.

While the NPR is expected to outline further details, President Trump's 2018 budget request, and current debates and reports on draft copies of the NPR, provide some clarity on its trajectory. President Trump appears likely to continue the Obama administration modernisation and may expand the development of sub-strategic weapon systems, notably nuclear cruise missiles. If the United States decides to emphasise the role of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in US military doctrine at a time of crisis in arms control, adversaries may interpret this as a maximum deterrence doctrine in which nuclear weapons would be used to assert strategic dominance and designed for nuclear warfighting scenarios.

## Upgrading existing or developing new nuclear weapons?

The 2010 NPR attempted to delicately balance arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation initiatives with its nuclear modernisation programme. Accordingly, it made the rhetorical commitment to reassure the world that the purpose of modernisation was only to maintain strategic stability and that, 'the United States will not develop new nuclear warheads. Life Extension Programs (LEPs) will use only nuclear components based on previously tested designs, and will not support new military missions or provide for new military capabilities.'<sup>38</sup>

Yet what constitutes a new capability is contested. On the one hand, it is often said in Washington that the United States cannot be the only country to resist modernising its nuclear arsenal, and that this arsenal needs to match (or more than match) that of its competitors. On the other hand, Adam Mount for example, argues that while it is admissible to update capabilities so that they hold the same targets at risk in the same way, it is inadmissible to upgrade capabilities that 'represent new ways of holding targets at risk.' Thus, upgrades that improve the usability of nuclear weapons by increasing their discrimination or threatening adversaries' second-strike capabilities are deeply unsettling.<sup>39</sup> Even such a careful approach that maintains current capabilities can come under criticism for undermining commitments to make tangible steps towards nuclear disarmament.

If modernisation plans lack carefully calibrated nuclear signalling and clear commitment to arms control to assure adversaries that modernisation does not constitute 'new nukes, new missions or new capabilities,' they could prompt Russia to take steps to counter perceived threats to strategic stability, steps that will be seen in Washington as escalatory and unacceptable.<sup>40</sup>

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38 *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, US Department of Defense, April, 2010.

39 Adam Mount, "The Case Against New Nuclear Weapons," *Centre for American Progress* (2017): 19-20.

40 Adam Mount, "Adapting nuclear modernisation to the new administration," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 73, no. 3 (2017): 170.

# Principles of the Program of Record

The design, development and production of a new ground-based strategic deterrent to replace the Minuteman III ICBM system does not radically alter the strategic balance in Europe. Compared to other systems, their distance from Europe could hold benefits for Europe in demonstrating that nuclear conflict cannot be limited to Europe itself. However, the new 666 ICBMs expected to be deployed until 2075 indicate a lack of critical thinking on the purpose of the US strategic deterrent within the administration.

This leg of the US nuclear deterrent has been roundly criticised for its high cost and vulnerability. Even Defence Secretary Mattis previously considered scrapping it before being confirmed in post because this ‘would reduce the false alarm danger.’ They principally serve as a ‘sponge’ to deliberately absorb a nuclear first strike from Russia and legitimise massive retaliation. As Secretary Mattis recently confirmed, the new land based deterrent will ‘soak up a lot’ of the enemy’s arsenal.<sup>41</sup> Yet this logic may be self-defeating for two reasons: first, as Jon Wolfsthal, former Senior Director for Arms Control and Nonproliferation at the National Security Council, has pointed out, ‘there is no credible evidence to suggest that either Russia or China is tempted to initiate a full-scale nuclear conflict by conducting a sudden strike to eliminate America’s nuclear force,’ and second, if they were ever used in response to a Russian strike they would be firing against empty Russian siloes.<sup>42</sup>

From NATO’s perspective, the principal fear of a nuclear escalation with Russia would arise from miscalculation and the escalation of a low-level conflict, not from a bolt-from-the-blue attempt of a Russian first strike. The modernisation of the ICBM leg of the triad, therefore, could contribute to the perception that the United States seeks to achieve nuclear dominance, as from Russia’s perspective, such weapons significantly contribute to the US ability to conduct an overwhelming nuclear first strike.

System	Modernisation Plan
Ground-based Strategic Deterrent	Plan to replace the current Minuteman III missiles with 666 new ICBMs.
<i>Columbia</i> Class SSBN	Plan to replace existing <i>Ohio</i> Class SSBNs with 12 new SSBNs.
Trident II D5 Life Extension Programme	Plan to modernise and extend the life of missiles of the SSBNs.
B-21 Long-Range Strike Bombers	Plan to replace B-2 and B-52 Bombers with new stealth bomber capable of carrying B61 gravity bombs and new Long-Range Standoff Weapon.
Long-Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO)	Plan to replace retired ALCMs with around 1,000 LRSO missiles used by US Bombers.
B61 Life Extension Programme	Plan to modernise, upgrade and consolidate B61 gravity bomb used by US bombers.

The United States is also planning to deploy 12 new *Columbia*-class ballistic missile submarines to replace the existing 14 *Ohio*-class submarines (SSBNs). The Federation of Atomic Scientists note that although the frequency of US deterrence patrols has more than halved since the end of the Cold War, the number of submarines operationally available has remained static, and that there are at any one time at least five US submarines out on patrol.<sup>43</sup>

41 Robert, Burns, “Defense chief says US must keep all 3 parts of nuclear force,” *Associated Press*, September 13, 2017, <http://m.startribune.com/amid-nkorea-crisis-mattis-focuses-on-us-doomsday-arsenal/444132223/?section=nation>

42 Jon Wolfsthal, “The political and military vulnerability of America’s land-based nuclear missiles” *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 73, no. 3 (2017): 152.

43 Hans M. Kristensen, “Declining Deterrent Patrols Indicate Too Many SSBNs,” *Federation of Atomic Scientists*, April

The new sea-leg of the US deterrent, involving *Columbia*-class submarines, will have higher performance capabilities than the current *Ohio* fleet. It will be equipped with an electric-drive propulsion train as opposed to the existing mechanical-drive propulsion train, making it quieter and more undetectable.<sup>44</sup> The submarine's D5 missiles' W76-1/Mk4A warheads have been fitted with a 'superfuze' since 2009. This new targeting mechanism radically improves the accuracy and efficacy of each warhead, particularly against hardened targets, which when combined with Russia's inadequate detection system increases the possibility of a successful US first-strike.<sup>45</sup> This superfuze will be fitted on all new warheads, likely making this a ubiquitous problem for all future US nuclear weapons.

The new air-leg of the deterrent consisting of dual capable B-21 Strategic Bombers and F-35 Joint Fighters capable of carrying B-61 gravity bombs and the new Long Range Standoff (LRSO) weapon are some of the more controversial nuclear developments. The LRSO programme will develop a 'nuclear cruise missile capable of penetrating and surviving complex advanced integrated air defence systems and GPS-denied environments from significant standoff range.' This programme has received attention in light of the INF Treaty dispute and funding has increased from under \$100 million to over \$451 million for FY 2018.<sup>46</sup> More recently the US Government awarded two contracts worth \$1.8 billion to Lockheed Martin and Raytheon to develop the new system.<sup>47</sup>

A perennial issue for all dual-capable missiles and platforms, nuclear cruise missiles could drive major crisis instabilities in Europe. It is not difficult to imagine how an escalating crisis could 'go nuclear' as Russia struggled to identify whether an incoming cruise missile was conventional or nuclear. LRSO will enable the United States to hold Russian Command and Control at risk in new ways, undermining Russian confidence in strategic systems. LRSO also lowers the threshold for nuclear use due to the perception of cruise missiles being tactical delivery systems and their greater precision. It therefore promotes the idea that nuclear weapons could be used at a sub-strategic level to 'restore deterrence.'<sup>48</sup>

Advocates have defended the weapon, arguing that it is needed to respond to Russia's INF violation and that in the future Russian air-defence will become so sophisticated that the US bomber fleet will not be able to penetrate defences. However, because Russia justifies capabilities as responses to existing US capabilities, US investment in LRSO could trigger further Russian developments of new weapon systems. Given the superiority of US military forces to their Russian counterparts, LRSO would represent the next step in the dynamic arms race, not just a response to existing capabilities.

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30, 2013, <https://fas.org/>

44 Ronald O'Roake, "Navy Columbia (SSBN-826) Class Ballistic Missile Submarine Program: Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Report*, R41129, October 4, 2017, <https://fas.org/srg/crs/weapons/R41129.pdf> 8.

45 Hans M. Kristensen, Matthew McKinzie and Theodore E. Postol, "How US nuclear force modernization is undermining strategic stability: The burst-height compensating super-fuze," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, March 1, 2017, <http://thebulletin.org/how-us-nuclear-force-modernization-undermining-strategic-stability-burst-height-compensating-super10578>

46 "Program Acquisition Cost By Weapon System: United States Department of Defence Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request," US Department of Defense, March, 2017, [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018\\_Weapons.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018_Weapons.pdf)

47 "Release No: CR-163-17," US Department of Defense, August 23, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract-View/Article/1287610/source/GovDelivery/>

48 Christine, Parthemore, "The ambiguity challenge: Why the world needs a multilateral nuclear cruise missile agreement," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 73, no. 3: 155, and Christine, Parthemore, "The Unique Risks of Nuclear Armed Cruise Missiles," in Borrie, John. Caughley, Tim, and Wan, Wilfred (eds.) *Understanding Nuclear Weapons Risks*. Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2017: 48.





## Sub-strategic nuclear weapons

A lingering issue in Europe, President Trump has not indicated any plans to reconsider the role of US B61 sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe - nuclear bombs with variable yields delivered by NATO allies. The B61's life extension programme will enable the bombs to stay in service for another 20 to 30 years, and means they can be carried by the dual-capable F-35 and B-21. It will have a new tail-kit and internal guidance system that improves its accuracy by three times along with a greater throw range. Such improvements, made to reduce the risk of radioactive fallout and cause fewer indiscriminate civilian casualties, could mean these weapons are increasingly seen as usable.

The role of sub-strategic nuclear weapons has historically divided NATO. During the lead up to the 2010 Strategic Concept the German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, advocated for their removal from Europe. The Strategic Concept and 2012 DDPR 'managed to reconcile but not resolve the Alliance's deep-seated differences' on sub-strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>49</sup> Parliaments of host countries remain apprehensive about the financial, security, political and diplomatic implications of hosting these modernised warheads from 2020 onwards. It remains uncertain how willing Europeans will be to host upgraded versions of these weapons that increase their usability. For example, in 2014 the Dutch Parliament passed a resolution preventing the government from buying nuclear capable versions of the F-35 Joint Fighters.<sup>50</sup>

Russia has repeatedly warned that the deployment of the new B61-12 would be met with a response. This could include the deployment of Russian sub-strategic nuclear weapons near NATO's eastern border (currently Russia

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49 Oliver Meier and Simon Lunn, "Trapped: NATO, Russia, and the Problem of Tactical Nuclear Weapons," *Arms Control Association*, January 9, 2014, <https://www.armscontrol.org/print/6107#9>

50 "33 763 Toekomst van de krijgsmacht Nr. 14 [33 763 Future of the armed forces, Nr. 14]," The Hague, November 6, 2013.

stores these weapons in central storage) as well as the retention of systems the United States accuse of violating the INF Treaty. This could prevent further nuclear weapons reductions in Europe which NATO insists are contingent on Russian progress in reducing its sub-strategic nuclear weapons. One Russian response could be the deployment of more INF-violating weapon systems.

Although gravity bombs have historically been symbolic of US assurance, these weapons have limited military utility against Europe's contemporary security threats and are a legacy of the Cold War. US commitment to NATO is measured more by its conventional commitment to the Alliance and its strategic systems based outside Europe. The B61-12 deployments strengthen Russian resolve to maintain its stockpile of sub-strategic nuclear weapons. European allies could consider ways of kick-starting confidence building measures on this issue. This could include exploring how best to openly discuss with the Russians the doctrine and military utility attached to these weapons, and a willingness to limit or scale down the B61-12 programme, and consider changes to basing arrangements in return for Russian reciprocity.

## Potential new systems?

On top of the existing modernisation programme there are indications that the United States is exploring three new nuclear weapon systems. First, the United States is investigating a low-yield warhead for a ballistic missile, possibly using a variant of the W76 Trident warhead. Second, the United States are also considering bringing back nuclear Tomahawk SLCM.<sup>51</sup> Third, as previously mentioned, Congress have mandated the development of a new nuclear GLCM banned by the INF Treaty.<sup>52</sup>

The creation of a new low-yield warhead for strategic missile systems, either the land- or sea-based deterrent, and the introduction of two new classes of nuclear cruise missiles on top of the air-launched LRSO option could be perceived as a willingness to use nuclear weapons for warfighting in sub-strategic scenarios or to conduct a first-strike. These weapons would be far more capable of evading Russian defences as well holding Russian military targets, vital infrastructure and command and control centres at risk in ways Russia cannot. Russia's sub-strategic weapons cannot threaten the US homeland.

The risk is that Europe is caught in a game of cat and mouse between the United States and Russia. While the US sub-strategic systems can be forward deployed to threaten Russia, or a new sub-strategic ballistic missile could be fired from the homeland, Russia's reliance on sub-strategic nuclear weapons and nuclear cruise missiles promotes deployment and targeting in Europe. Therefore, any sub-strategic nuclear arms race would uniquely affect Europe. European allies need to consider how new US systems contribute to NATO's strategy as outlined in the Strategic Concept and DDPR. European NATO members have unique leverage over US systems that are forward deployed to Europe, since they involve consultations within NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements and the NPG.

## Is the United States planning to resume nuclear testing?

Any new warheads for new systems may mean the United States will restart nuclear testing. The United States has not ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) but has maintained a moratorium on nuclear testing since 1992. The signals are mixed. This year's budget request, in contrast to many other areas experiencing major cuts to programmes, largely protected funding for the CTBT Organisation, appropriating \$31 million against the previous year's \$33 million. This was in recognition of the CTBT Organisation's International Monitoring System (IMS), accepting that 'a reduction in IMS capability could deprive the U.S. of an irreplaceable source of nuclear explosion

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51 Julian Borger, "Trump team drawing up fresh plans to bolster US nuclear arsenal," *Guardian*, October 29, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/29/trump-us-nuclear-weapons-arsenal>

52 "Section 1243," National Defence Authorization Act.

monitoring data.<sup>53</sup> This fails to recognise the contribution of the moratorium to preventing vertical proliferation and to nuclear disarmament in the longer term.

However, there are multiple indications that the United States may resume testing:

- In December 2016, the Defence Science Board issued a report calling for the United States to resume active nuclear testing to develop a new 'lower-yield, primary-only' nuclear warhead.<sup>54</sup>
- This year, Air Force Chief of Staff David Goldfein stated he was 'absolutely' open to considering new nuclear capabilities and that he expected to have 'discussion about munitions' and 'yields,' and Vice Admiral Robert R. Monroe recently recommended underground nuclear testing of 'advanced and specialised warheads' as well as replacing the US nuclear arsenal with 'new-design weapons.'<sup>55</sup>
- A group of Republican Members of Congress have introduced a bill that seeks to restrict funding for the CTBTO, to be debated as an amendment to the National Defence Authorisation Act.<sup>56</sup>
- More recently, it has been reported that the NPR will likely reduce the lead time the United States would need to resume nuclear testing from three years.<sup>57</sup>

While low-yield weapons have often been debated in the US nuclear community – for instance, President George W. Bush's planned 'bunker buster' bombs in the 2002 NPR – there is a notable difference in the current proposals in their implied threats to Russia. General Selva in September 2017 commented that smaller yield nuclear weapons would give the President more options for using nuclear weapons in warfighting scenarios.<sup>58</sup> General Selva contends that the United States needs a distinct nuclear capability for various tactical scenarios: 'as horrible as nuclear war is, we do still apply some of the rules of war to it. So, a proportional reaction to an enemy's attack is actually a righteous and reasonable thing to do.' Russia, the only country that the United States could conceivably fight a nuclear war with, may interpret such weapons as directly aimed at them.

The magnitude of the achievement made in the 1990s in establishing the moratorium and the impact of unconstrained nuclear weapons testing should not be forgotten. If the United States were to restart nuclear testing, this would likely result in the collapse of the global moratorium, and very likely new Russian and Chinese warheads and testing. More widely, if states considered international agreements on arms control and non-proliferation to be faltering this could provoke wider proliferation. European allies should highlight the importance of the CTBT and the US moratorium on nuclear testing to European security, and should explore what the negative impacts might be of resumed nuclear testing on security and proliferation risks in NATO's periphery.

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53 "Congressional Budget Justification," US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271013.pdf> p338

54 *Seven Defense Priorities for the new Administration*, US Defense Science Board, December, 2016, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dsb/priorities.pdf>

55 John M. Donnelly, "Top Air Force General Open to Changes in Nuclear Arms," *CQ Roll Call*, February 7, 2017 and Monroe, "Trump Should Undo Obama's Disastrous Nuclear Policies"; Steve Holland, "Trump Wants to Make Sure U.S. Nuclear Arsenal at 'Top of the Pack,'" *Reuters*, February 24, 2017, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-exclusive-idUSKBN1622IF>.

56 "A bill to restrict funding for the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, and for other purposes," S. 332, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/332>

57 Borger, "Trump team drawing up fresh plans to bolster US nuclear arsenal"

58 James McIntyre, "Pentagon considering 'mini-nukes' for maximum deterrence," *Washington Examiner*, August 5, 2017, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/pentagon-considering-mini-nukes-for-maximum-deterrence/article/2630697>



# Sending Diplomatic Signals

President Trump has cast doubt on the US' commitment to engage constructively on global non-proliferation and disarmament issues. And he has increased uncertainty in NATO and Russia relations. This signalling is undermining regimes that are built on credibility and that seek to build trust through reciprocity.

Perceptions matter: rhetoric is key to signalling the context of military action. In balancing defence, extended deterrence, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation commitments, the United States must carefully calibrate its signalling. Yet President Trump is sending alarming signals in two ways.

First, he has introduced a high level of ambiguity into US non-proliferation signalling as well as military signalling with both allies and adversaries alike. While of course a degree of uncertainty is to be expected from any new administration and limited ambiguity has always remained a component of nuclear deterrence, President Trump is throwing out the playbook of nuclear signalling that has until now offered some degree of stability in the face of nuclear threats. He may believe that such unpredictability strengthens his hand by confusing and wrong-footing his opponents, but this also raises the dangers of miscalculation and risks undermining trust in arms control negotiations. In a recent meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, General C. Robert Kehler, former Commander of US



Strategic Command admitted that, 'changes or conflicting signals can have profound implications for deterrence, extended deterrence, and for the confidence of the men and the women in the nuclear forces.'<sup>59</sup>

Second, President Trump's signalling suggests that he sees nuclear weapons as the ultimate bargaining chip to be used in international diplomacy, indicating that a larger US arsenal will benefit the United States in negotiations. This can be used against both European allies and Russia – a form of leverage to pressure other nations into fulfilling US strategic aims. Increasing the saliency of nuclear weapons in diplomacy could provoke others to take similarly reductive approaches to diplomacy and could undermine arms control agreements in Europe. If the political role of nuclear weapons is expanded, it could increase their attraction to potential adversaries as the only means by which they might limit their exposure to US compellence, such as China, Iran, Russia and North Korea.

## Why is US signalling ambiguous?

Many of President Trump's pronouncements on nuclear weapons contradict both his previous comments and those of others in his Administration, leaving allies and adversaries to speculate about how to interpret changing US policy. Until the NPR completes, signalling is currently the main means by which Europeans will read US policy. As Jeffrey Michaels and Heather Williams have noted, even if President Trump's views on nuclear weapons were not 'significantly different from previous [Republican] administrations,' his new approach to signalling is deeply destabilising.<sup>60</sup> Indeed it is worth noting that President Obama, who initiated the most sweeping US nuclear modernisation programme in history was criticised less than President Bush internationally, due to his signalling.

One issue contributing to unclear signalling is that within the US Government nuclear weapons can have different purposes for different actors. While there is internal consensus on the importance of the US nuclear arsenal, for more traditional Republicans it is essential for US reassurance of allies and deterrence against an increasingly aggressive Russia, whilst for President Trump, it is leverage and a key tool to facilitate confident engagement. Both wings support its modernisation, but their views on arms control and the non-proliferation regime differ. This results in contradictory and ambiguous signalling.

Such ambiguity could explain why the United States has struggled to take coordinated action on the INF Treaty, New START and the JCPoA, and appears to be engaging in a form of arms control brinkmanship. President Trump has been highly equivocal and has failed to express support for the agreements when they have been in danger. Instead, he has expressed confidence in his ability to negotiate a better deal than previous Presidents. While this occurs, he has clashed with members of Congress, allies and those within his Administration as deals hang in limbo. It is unclear whether President Trump's transactional approach or more traditional interpretations of foreign policy drive US foreign policy. This could have dangerous ramifications for negotiations involving US and NATO vital interests, if others view the US as an unwilling or untrustworthy actor.

Another contributory factor is President Trump's widespread use of Twitter. Research has shown that Twitter demands simplicity, and can promote impulsivity as well as foster a degree of incivility when used as a form of political communication.<sup>61</sup> Twitter, with its ambiguous target audience, compounds the risks of misperception and can

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59 General C. Robert Kehler, "Authorisations for the Use of Military Force," United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, March 30, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1163&v=QDg1SdT\\_OJM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1163&v=QDg1SdT_OJM)

60 Jeffrey Michaels and Heather Williams, "The Nuclear Education of Donald Trump," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017): 54-77.

61 Brian L Ott, "The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34 no. 1:59-68.

undermine discussions on a sensitive topics such as nuclear weapons, when the United States needs to signal to multiple actors.<sup>62</sup>

With such factors complicating traditional US signalling in Europe, it is becoming harder for allies and adversaries to gauge US nuclear weapon policy and direction. In this environment US signalling on its global non-proliferation commitments, its alliance commitments and relationship with Russia are increasingly being read in a negative light.

## Wider non-proliferation commitments

The US approach to arms control agreements that affect Europe and its modernisation programme have been underpinned by a wider questioning of US commitments to global non-proliferation. Where will NATO's policy of moving towards a world free of nuclear weapons be in a year's time, and how will the Europeans adjust in the light of Washington's scepticism towards the policy?<sup>63</sup> In March, Chris Ford said the forthcoming NPR 'will question whether traditional US fidelity to the vision of nuclear-free world is viable reality' and confirmed that the United States was reviewing 'whether or not a goal of a world without nuclear weapons is in fact a realistic objective in the near to medium term.' He noted 'the tension between the goal of disarmament and national security needs', and suggested that, considering the Administration's goal to 'not accept second place in the nuclear weapons arena', US nuclear weapon capabilities could take precedence over non-proliferation and disarmament commitments.<sup>64</sup>

If the United States abandoned the vision of nuclear disarmament, it would present the greatest threat to the nuclear non-proliferation regime in a generation. NATO's most recent statement on non-proliferation, the Warsaw Communique, praised the JCPoA and the INF Treaty, while noting continuing concerns about Iran's ballistic missile capabilities and Russia's compliance with INF Treaty. Furthermore, it called on all states to combat proliferation through entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), negotiation of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and implementation of the Proliferation Security Initiative.<sup>65</sup>

The most recent US Administration budget spending proposals have quietly reduced funding activities in support of the NPT. These include: State Department cuts of 65%, to programmes keeping fissile material out of the hands of terrorists from \$130 million to \$46 million; a stagnant NNSA's non-proliferation budget at \$1.8 billion; and scrapping the previous plan to fast-track the dismantlement of unused warheads. This could signal that future contributions will become contingent on transactional agreements, slowing and complicating progress on non-proliferation and disarmament.

## Nuclear signalling with European allies

Contemporary US nuclear posture could be sending two contradictory signals to Europeans. First, nuclear modernisation is signalling US underlying commitment to the strategic security of Europe. Second, it could alternatively provide a tool to pressurise European allies to increase their defence spending.

Credible assurance signalling requires concrete deployments. Scholars such as James D. Fearon have even argued that forward deployments are necessary in extended deterrence, though the fact that nuclear delivery systems have

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62 Jeffrey and Williams, "The Nuclear Education of Donald Trump."

63 NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept states that: 'we are resolved to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons in accordance with the goals of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.' The 2012 Defence and Deterrence Posture Review (DDPR) reaffirmed this objective.

64 Chris Ford, "Morning Keynote with NSC Senior Director Christopher Ford," filmed at Carnegie Conference, March 21, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJxg8LehvhA>

65 "Defence and Deterrence Posture Review," NATO, 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_87597.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm)

## The Ban Treaty

The United States has led opposition to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), more commonly known as the Ban Treaty, adopted with the support of 122 nations on 7 July and opened for signature on 20 September 2017. It presents a set of unique risks for NATO as a nuclear alliance. First, there is a persuasive legal interpretation of Article 1(f) that means membership of NATO as currently constituted and signature of the TPNW are mutually exclusive. It could profoundly affect NATO's nuclear posture were a member to join the Treaty. The Dutch government, although opposing the TPNW, was called upon by its Parliament to attend the negotiations. The Italian parliament on 19 September instructed its government to consider the implications of joining the TPNW, and there is a growing domestic movement within Norway in favour of joining.<sup>66</sup>

Second, it remains to be seen how the TPNW will interact with the existing non-proliferation regime. Critics have maintained that it will deepen the divide between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, and could threaten existing processes by establishing parallel structures that could confuse or compete. For example, a concern for NATO may be that the Treaty establishes differing safeguard standards, mandating Nuclear Weapon States to sign the Additional Protocol as they move towards disarmament, while allowing current Non-Nuclear Weapon States to enjoy lower safeguard standards. Or it might be that a member of the TPNW could decide that its obligations under that treaty allow it to reduce its commitments under other dimensions of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Whatever the status of debates over the TPNW's merits, it has become part of the fabric of non-proliferation and disarmament reality. Already the difference in the degree of opposition to it from the United States and its European allies can be seen. As such, it is incumbent on European allies to properly consider how responses to the TPNW will be interpreted globally and what responses will signal a commitment to the step-by-step approach and breathe new life into the non-proliferation regime.

NATO could consider issuing unified Negative Security Assurances. Allies in the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review note 'the importance of the independent and unilateral negative security assurances' offered by members and 'recognise the value that these statements can have in seeking to discourage nuclear proliferation' but maintain that NSAs are the preserve of individual member states.<sup>67</sup> However, NATO is an explicit nuclear alliance and commonly coordinates nuclear posture within the NPG. A NATO declaratory policy could govern its nuclear collaboration and operations, a credible means to establish cooperation and reduce the saliency of nuclear weapons within a multilateral approach.<sup>68</sup>

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66 Emil Dall, "A Balancing Act: NATO States and the Nuclear Ban Treaty," *European Leadership Network*, July, 2017, <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2017/07/31/ec6b54e0/170721%20Nuclear%20Ban%20Treaty%20Issues%20Brief.pdf>

67 "Defence and Deterrence Posture Review," NATO.

68 Paul Ingram, "Renewing Interest in Negative Security Assurances," BASIC, June, 2017, [http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/NSAs-June2017\\_0.pdf](http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/NSAs-June2017_0.pdf)

global reach and strategic impact would seem to contradict this.<sup>69</sup> Stationing new US nuclear assets in Europe might be seen as increasing US/NATO nuclear credibility by:

- shifting the balance of power;
- assuring allies by placing US soldiers and weapons at risk; and
- signalling resolve through the high price of nuclear weapons.<sup>70</sup>

However, recent studies have revealed that 'deploying nuclear weapons on a protégé's territory does not reduce the likelihood that the protégé will be targeted in a militarised dispute, once we account for the effect of the alliance itself.'<sup>71</sup> In other words, forward deployment may have as much an effect of creating a target as deterring an adversary.

If the US President attempts to use modernisation to pressure allies to increase defence contributions towards the alliance this could result in push back and end up weakening the cohesion of the Alliance.<sup>72</sup> The institutional nuclear weapon cooperation within NATO that signals its deterrence posture 'is inseparable from the institutional basis that gives U.S. alliance credibility as a whole.'<sup>73</sup> The purpose of nuclear cooperation is not just to signal extended deterrence, but rather to negotiate the management of the Alliance, while ensuring US commitment. Disagreements on nuclear policy or doubts about US commitment can be very damaging.

While some have expressed fears that President Trump will destroy the 'institutional fabric of U.S. alliances,' the NATO Alliance does offer an institutional framework for resolving these issues.<sup>74</sup> Historically, the United States has played a role within NATO of preserving alliance unity while extending deterrence rather than simply implementing its foreign policy goals. President Trump may see extended deterrence not as a collective NATO deterrent but a US deterrent extended benevolently to Europe.<sup>75</sup> He has signalled that he sees the relationship as one with transatlantic *allies* rather one of a transatlantic *alliance* of partners, shifting the focus onto US relative superiority. If US and European policies on nuclear issues continue to diverge, it will be important to ensure that such differences are negotiated in such a manner as to respect Europeans interests in the Alliance. Management of the various issues mentioned in this report will be an important test of this.

## Nuclear signalling with Russia

By far the most important actor for the United States to signal nuclear policy to in Europe is Russia. In response to unclear and sometimes contradictory signalling, it is likely that Russia may assume the worst, that being the habit of defence establishments. Russia will pick up on comments within the United States that refer to it as a nuclear threat and target. For example, in a Congressional hearing in March, General Selva argued that the 'continuing realisation that Russia intends to project itself as a great power', is the largest strategic change since the 2010 NPR and will be the focus of the present NPR.<sup>76</sup> The White House's unwillingness to talk holistically about arms control, a possible

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69 James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 68–90.

70 Matthew Fuhrmann and Sechster S. Todd. "Signaling Alliance Commitments: Hand-Tying and Sunk Costs in Extended Nuclear Deterrence," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 4 (2014): 919-935.

71 *ibid*: 920.

72 Stephan Fruhling and Andrew O'Neil, "Nuclear weapons, the United States and alliances in Europe and Asia: Towards an institutional perspective," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1: 4-25.

73 Fruhling and O'Neil "Nuclear weapons, the United States and alliances in Europe and Asia": 19.

74 Knopf in Fruhling and O'Neil "Nuclear weapons, the United States and alliances in Europe and Asia": 19.

75 Fruhling and O'Neil "Nuclear weapons, the United States and alliances in Europe and Asia": 48.

76 Selva, "Military Assessment of Nuclear Deterrence Requirements," US Committee on Armed Services, March 8, 2017.





modernisation programme that would deliver a superior US strategic capability that could create some form of dominance and ambiguous US signalling will affect Russian strategic thinking and affirm the conclusion that the two are locked into strategic competition. As the NPR outcome draws near, the window to avoid a downward spiral of relations may be closing.

A recent report by those who have seen a draft of the NPR speculated that it may relax the constraints of the previous 2010 NPR which pledged that the United States would use nuclear weapons only in 'extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners.'<sup>77</sup> This would mark a major step back from the broad consensus that nuclear weapons are for last resort, would contradict the current role of nuclear weapons within NATO and most dangerously could be interpreted as the United States preparing ways to coerce Russia with nuclear weapons. The new NPR may come to be seen as designed not to restore trust with Russia and improve global strategic stability, but to maximise US capabilities and freedom of action.

## Is it possible to limit the spiralling threat perception?

Clearer NATO and US signalling, specifically on nuclear declaratory policy, could help improve relations. NATO's ambiguity over when it would use nuclear weapons in an escalating crisis increases the risk of miscalculation and helps contribute to Russian fears, feeding the further integration and modernisation of Russian nuclear and conventional forces as potential countermeasures. Allies could do more to make explicit the circumstances in which NATO would sanction nuclear use. To this extent European allies could encourage the United States to reaffirm its 1985 joint statement that 'a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.'<sup>78</sup> Or alternatively, a similar

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<sup>77</sup> Borger, "Trump team drawing up fresh plans to bolster US nuclear arsenal."

<sup>78</sup> Kingston Reif and Maggie Tennis, "Pulling the U.S.-Russia Relationship Back from the Nuclear Brink," *National Interest*, April 12, 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/pulling-the-us-russia-relationship-back-the-nuclear->

statement could be issued by the NATO - Russia Council, making clear the risks and dangers of nuclear escalation and the acknowledgement that nuclear weapons are always strictly strategic. There could also be moves to consider declarations of no first use of nuclear weapons.<sup>79</sup>

Europeans could encourage the United States to consider more systematically how Russia will interpret its actions and to account for the implications and the risks involved. The 2013 US Nuclear Employment Guidance states that 'The United States seeks to improve strategic stability by demonstrating that it is not our intent to negate Russia's strategic nuclear deterrence, or to destabilise the strategic military relationship with Russia.'<sup>80</sup> The manner in which the United States continues to operationalise this guidance has important implications for European security, and is a basis for transatlantic consultations. Whilst it may be necessary to maintain a deterrence relationship, NATO allies could develop an engagement strategy to give Russia a greater stake in European security and stability in the long term. This could consider how existing treaties and processes can be used to foster better NATO-Russia relations.

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**Clearer NATO and US signalling, specifically on nuclear declaratory policy, could help improve relations.**

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79 Alexey Arbatov, "Beyond the Nuclear Threshold: Russia, NATO, and Nuclear First Use" *European Leadership Network*, April, 2017.

80 "Report on Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States Specified in Section 491 of 10 U.S.C.," US Department of Defense, June, 2013, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/us-nuclear-employment-strategy.pdf>

# Conclusion

US nuclear policy is changing. The forthcoming NPR will provide much-needed clarity but so far there seem to be worrying signals as to the direction it will go. President Trump appears set to disrupt the delicate balance between nuclear arms control and modernisation and has indicated a lack of commitment to the bargain at the heart of the global non-proliferation regime. Critically, the INF crisis could endanger the possibility of any future European arms control. On top of President Trump's approach to arms control agreements and modernisation, his signalling on nuclear policy has left room for misinterpretation, heightening the impression that he is seeking maximum deterrence and strategic dominance. This stance strongly diverges from NATO's Strategic Concept goal to decrease the saliency of nuclear weapons in Europe. It cuts across the delicate bargain between arms control, disarmament and deterrence that has bridged the differing national perceptions within NATO. It plays into Russian fears of US military threats to strategic stability in Europe based on mutual vulnerability. There is a real risk of a new type of nuclear insecurity emerging in Europe.

NATO has historically provided the institutional framework for allies to raise nuclear policy concerns and seek consensus-based decisions with the United States relating to European security. NATO's institutional framework offers European allies the opportunity to impact upon and moderate US policy, and to consider new and innovative ways to tackle Europe's 21st century nuclear threats. European inaction promises renewed saliency to nuclear weapons at the same time that traditional doctrines of nuclear deterrence are challenged by technological advancements and established approaches to arms control falter. Not since the Cold War has it been so important for NATO to manage and create the conditions for sustainable security in Europe in a way that is cooperative rather than adversarial.

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