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Dissecting the DDPR

*NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review
and the Future of Nuclear Sharing*

NATO's Chicago Summit in May provided the Alliance with its second opportunity in two years to re-think the presence of U.S. theatre nuclear weapons in Europe; and for the second consecutive time, NATO failed. The following is an examination of key decisions made (and not made) in Chicago, as they relate to the future of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements, and of the Alliance itself.

NATO's serial failure was to address (at the Lisbon 2010 and Chicago 2012 summits) discontent in key NATO capitals with the present nuclear sharing arrangement between the United States and five allies which currently host U.S. B61 nuclear gravity bombs. At Lisbon this led via compromise to a most NATO-like solution: the creation of a new review process (the Deterrence and Defense Posture Review, or DDPR) including a new committee to staff the DDPR's work (the WMD Control and Disarmament Committee, or WCDC).

At Lisbon, allies agreed the following mandate for the DDPR:

“We have tasked the Council to continue to review NATO's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance, taking into account changes in the evolving international security environment. This comprehensive review should be undertaken by all Allies on the basis of deterrence and defence posture principles agreed in the Strategic Concept, taking into account WMD and ballistic missile proliferation. Essential elements of the review would include the range of NATO's strategic capabilities required, including NATO's nuclear posture, and missile defence and other means of strategic deterrence and defence. This only applies to nuclear weapons assigned to NATO.”¹

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The enormity of the task NATO undertook with the DDPR should not be underestimated. NATO's main political divide is basic: Is the purpose of the Alliance, as older members generally seem to agree, to operationalize allied security concerns in places such as Afghanistan and Libya, to act as the tool of choice in dealing with the global security concerns of its members? Or is it to provide the mutual-defence security guarantees enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, as newer and more easterly allies prefer to see it?

The dividing line is, of course, Russia. Allies generally either view Moscow as a potential partner and friend, or as NATO's once-and-future nuclear-armed foe. Negotiations within NATO revolve around the demands of countries such as the Baltic republics for various assurances from NATO that Russia will not be allowed to dominate them through political and military pressure. Others, such as Germany, have a very hard time publicly imputing ill intentions to Moscow, reflecting both historical concerns and modern economic realities. The United States finds itself balancing a delicate and unstable equilibrium between these partners, while also paying some attention to the impact of its guarantees upon its Russian negotiating partners.

While there are other fault lines visible within the Alliance (Turkey, for example, will not allow Iran to be named in Alliance documents as a ballistic missile or potential nuclear threat to NATO, despite insisting on 100% coverage of its territory by NATO's missile defence system against regional ballistic missile threats), the Good Russia/Bad Russia divide largely defines NATO's inability to agree a new nuclear posture. The exception to this rule is France, which prefers to engage Russia much as Germany does, as an economic and

political partner, but which fears attempts to alter NATO's nuclear posture as stalking horses for general nuclear disarmament.

Even though France's independent strategic nuclear force is connected only nominally to NATO and in no way to its nuclear sharing arrangements with the United States, the French refuse to allow meaningful consideration within the Alliance of alterations to the nuclear sharing status quo. NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) and its senior advisory body, the High Level Group (HLG), may discuss what they like about nuclear posture and policy; when decisions are made by meetings of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), Paris permits no significant changes.

The Report

The allies had 18 months to debate the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's deterrence and defence posture, but it took them almost 12 months before political representatives began discussing the DDPR content in earnest because of disagreements over its scope and purpose. In the end, the final text was 'pre-cooked' by 'the Quad', an informal grouping of the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany, and then adopted by the April 2012 meeting of NATO defence ministers. Although there is some discomfort about the very existence of the Quad of powerful states (with nuclear weapon states (NWS) in a 3:1 majority) in what is meant to be an Alliance of equals (where NWS comprise just over 10 per cent of members), its intervention is often necessary to unravel tangled debates when time is short before Ministerial and Summit meetings.²

The final report of the DDPR consists of 34 paragraphs divided into six sections. The first

section of the DDPR final report lays out the premise of the review:

*“At the Lisbon Summit, the Heads of State and Government mandated a review of NATO’s overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance, taking into account the changes in the evolving international security environment.”*³

What a number of arms control-friendly countries such as Germany wanted was a duplication of the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) of 2010: a thorough review of NATO’s nuclear sharing policy and resulting force posture, hopefully followed by a statement of Alliance declaratory policy that would mirror the U.S. review.⁴ What they got, thanks to French resistance, was a potpourri of nuclear posture, conventional deterrence, missile defence, and arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, or ADN, as NATO calls it, and little sense of how the whole thing hung together.

*“The review has reinforced Alliance cohesion and the continuing credibility of its posture.”*⁵

This is arguably not the case for the five allies which requested a review of NATO’s nuclear policy on 26 February 2010, nor for the several others which publicly supported their letter to NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.⁶ NATO’s consensus rule means all 28 allies need to support any change to policy, so any one state can block change, as happened with nuclear policy at Lisbon and again at Chicago. Such tactics must not be confused with ‘reinforcing cohesion’, however.⁷

NATO’s nuclear policy

There are political, economic and military reasons why the nuclear status quo cannot continue much longer without threatening to divide the Alliance. Without agreement to change, however, NATO’s consensus rule prohibits any alteration in that status quo – and thus the stage is set for NATO’s post-Chicago nuclear posture debate to continue, whether allies welcome it or not. The DDPR itself attempted to paper over the cracks:

*“Nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO’s overall capabilities for deterrence and defence alongside conventional and missile defence forces. The review has shown that the Alliance’s nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture.”*⁸

NATO’s inability to agree changes to its nuclear posture (or for that matter to reach real agreement on maintaining the status quo) comes at a crucial time for the Alliance. Economic contraction has already spelled the end of the post-September 11 spending spree on defence for most allies, and will only worsen over the next few years. The size of defence cuts forthcoming in the U.S. budget process could surprise many, and will mean an even tighter spending and planning regime for NATO over the next decade. Combined with economic tightening, the prospect of upgrading, replacing and/or performing life extensions on NATO’s nuclear weapons and delivery systems over the next 10-15 years means the nuclear sharing status quo is unlikely to be maintained. Allies are highly likely to balk at bearing their share of these costs, especially the five allied nations which currently supply bases for U.S. B61 bombs, which all lack public support for this arrangement.

The ultimate driver of change, however, may lie elsewhere. The United States is already preparing to overhaul its B61 inventory, which currently exists in five variants that deliver the explosive equivalent of between 300 and 360,000 tons of TNT. Four of these are scheduled to be replaced by a new precision-guided version, the B61-12. With a classified level of accuracy that must surely compare with conventional precision-guided (i.e., JDAM) bombs, the B61-12 will in itself represent a significant increase in the nuclear capabilities of the Alliance.

The prospect of highly accurate bombs which could take out hardened targets at lower blast levels (and thus with less collateral damage) might prove enticing to military planners. If combined with the troubled F-35 stealth fighter-bomber, currently the only aircraft scheduled to replace NATO's aging fleet of 'dual-capable' delivery aircraft (DCA), the B61-12 would initiate a highly accurate and battlespace-survivable aspect to NATO's nuclear sharing program which potential adversaries, notably the Russian Federation, could only look upon with deep suspicion. It would also send a global signal of indefinite commitment to forward deployments, and of lack of concern over non-proliferation norms, by the world's most powerful Alliance.⁹

Disunity amongst the allies over the future of the existing nuclear weapon systems when investment was required was bad enough already. When it becomes clear the choice is between modernisation that will antagonise the Russians and set back the cause of global disarmament, and abandoning European deployments altogether, allies will be all the more in disagreement. The language used in the DDPR, that the Alliance's nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an

effective deterrence and defence posture', holds a sting in the tail for modernisation. If the current force is adequate, then why have allies already gone along with U.S. plans to deploy the B61-12 in Europe near the end of this decade?

Germany and other like-minded allies had hoped to achieve a more positive NATO statement on its nuclear declaratory policy, but what was agreed was minimal in language that is as opaque in meaning as it is conservative in impact:

*"Allies acknowledge the importance of the independent and unilateral negative security assurances offered by the United States, the United Kingdom and France. Those assurances guarantee, without prejudice to the separate conditions each State has attached to those assurances, including the inherent right to self-defence as recognised under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, that nuclear weapons will not be used or threatened to be used against Non-Nuclear Weapon States that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations."*¹⁰

This paragraph protects the nuclear weapon states' control of declaratory policy, and therefore fails to bring consistency to the Alliance's position, or involvement from allies responsible for endorsing the deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe.

One of the main reasons Quad agreement on a DDPR text was necessary, in fact, was the prolonged debate over which verb phrase to use in the above statement. 'Take note of' and 'acknowledge' were the contending choices toward the end; the compromise by which

France agreed to allow the more positive ‘acknowledgement’ was rendered less meaningful in the French text, which used the words, ‘prennent note de’ (literally meaning ‘take note of’).

“Consistent with our commitment to remain a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist, Allies agree that the NAC will task the appropriate committees to develop concepts for how to ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies concerned [i.e., all except France] in their nuclear sharing arrangements, including in case NATO were to decide to reduce its reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe.”¹¹

France has had extreme misgivings over NATO discussions of nuclear posture and policy, fearful that it might end up being isolated in Europe and within NATO on nuclear weapons policy and arms control. Paradoxically, the French have chosen to control the nuclear debate within NATO by opting out of NATO committees which control nuclear posture and policy. Thus, the only parts of NATO’s political structure tasked to examine nuclear issues must do so without French input, even while France refuses to allow the Alliance as a whole to discuss those issues in any meaningful way.

The role of conventional forces

“The bulk of the conventional capabilities that are available now and will be available in the future for Alliance operations are provided by the Allies individually; they must therefore provide adequate resources for their military forces so that they will have the required characteristics, notwithstanding current

and probably continuing financial difficulties.”¹²

The DDPR was intended to be comprehensive in scope, giving equal weight to nuclear and conventional forces, as well as to missile defence capabilities and arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. However, as noted above, NATO’s nuclear posture (and the lack of change at Lisbon) was the reason for the DDPR – the fact that it was not the NATO Nuclear Posture Review is due simply to French intransigence. It is for this reason that little time or effort was spent trying to determine what the conventional component of the ‘appropriate mix’ should look like. This was a missed opportunity.

With conventional weapons, as with NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangements, maintaining the status quo appears highly unlikely, and attempts to do so could arguably harm the Alliance. As former Defense Secretary Robert Gates said in his farewell address to NATO in 2011, “Future U.S. political leaders - those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me - may not consider the return on America’s investment in NATO worth the cost.” Gates went on to blast allies who are “willing and eager for American taxpayers to assume the growing security burden left by reductions in European defense budgets.”¹³

Meanwhile, America’s strategic thinking continues to evolve, and the global recession has sped up reconsideration of U.S. conventional force posture worldwide. New thinking is certainly called for in Europe, where tank-heavy formations recall the bad old days of the Cold War – at great expense to the U.S. taxpayer, as Gates noted. Allies reassured by the presence of U.S. ‘boots on the ground’ may, however, not like the look of the smaller,

leaner and more agile conventional force posture that the Pentagon is working on. There does not appear to be any other way forward, however. The Obama administration claims to seek a strategic ‘pivot to Asia’ – militarily, this will involve air and naval forces working together to promote regional security, and will leave even less budgetary leeway for maintaining U.S. armoured dinosaurs in Europe.¹⁴

Missile defences

“Missile defence can complement the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence; it cannot substitute for them.”¹⁵

One is sorely tempted to ask if 18 months of debate, and thousands of staff hours consumed, really led to nothing more than a NATO decision that ‘defence is not deterrence’.

“In Chicago, Heads of State and Government announced that NATO has achieved an Interim capability for its missile defence. The United States will contribute the European Phased Adaptive Approach to NATO missile defence. Alliance leaders also welcome decisions by individual Allies to contribute to the NATO missile defence mission, encourage calls for possible additional voluntary contributions by Allies, including through multinational cooperation, to provide relevant capabilities.”¹⁶

The real internal problem with NATO’s missile defence system is that all major contributions are American: the AN/TPY-2 X-band radar facility hosted by Turkey; the AEGIS-class BMD destroyers which carry both additional missile defence sensors and Standard Missile-3 interceptors; and much more. Without significantly more European

contributions, there is a danger that missile defence will turn into a problem not just with Russia, but an additional and unwelcome burden-sharing problem within the Alliance itself.

“NATO missile defence is not oriented against Russia nor does it have the capability to undermine Russia’s strategic deterrent. The Alliance, in a spirit of reciprocity, maximum transparency and mutual confidence, will actively seek cooperation on missile defence with Russia and, in accordance with NATO’s policy of engagement with third states on ballistic missile defence, engage with other relevant states, to be decided on a case-by-case basis.”¹⁷

The crux of the issue is this: will NATO accede to Russian demands for legally-binding guarantees that NATO’s missile defence system will not be used against the Russian Federation? Or will NATO press on with the roll-out of all four contemplated phases of its system, and thereby risk its relationship with the Russians? Russian fears of an eventual serious degradation of its land- and sea-based strategic deterrent force by NATO’s relatively modest missile defence system have been questioned both by U.S. and NATO officials, but increasingly also by Russian experts.¹⁸

That said, the Russians do have reason for suspicion and complaint: the B61-12 upgrade plans noted above, but this is also a development that the Russians might have a clear answer to. NATO cannot assume that the introduction of the world’s first precision-guided nuclear gravity bomb will go unnoticed or unchallenged by its neighbours (Russia and Iran in particular). Having already agreed to U.S. B61 upgrade and deployment plans without consulting its Russian ‘partners’,

NATO can hardly be surprised by an eventual strongly negative reaction. There are potentially negative implications for all other issues covered by the DDPR as well, thus nuclear modernization would make it less likely that proposed NATO changes in conventional force posture will be viewed benignly by Moscow and the chances of successful cooperation on missile defence might diminish.

Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation

“Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation play an important role in the achievement of the Alliance’s security objectives.”¹⁹

Absent real change to NATO’s nuclear posture, this statement smacks of more than a bit of window dressing. Nuclear arms control and disarmament at NATO can only take place by decision of the North Atlantic Council, as advised by its subsidiary committee on nuclear matters, the NPG. The WCDC and other arms control bodies have a mandate to discuss ADN issues, but no mandate to actually change nuclear force posture and/or policy. Only the NAC can take such decisions – and as noted above, France does not permit meaningful change on such issues at that level.

“Allies believe that the Weapons of Mass Destruction Control and Disarmament Committee has played a useful role in the review and agree to establish a committee as a consultative and advisory forum, with its mandate to be agreed by the NAC following the Summit.”²⁰

Following the Lisbon Summit, it took months of tense wrangling at the committee level (and serious arm-twisting at the political level) for

NATO to agree to establish the WCDC. The decision quoted above does not extend the mandate of that committee, however. It simply allows for the creation of ‘a committee’ to consult and advise on Alliance ADN issues. The prospect for the next several months is for more difficult debate, since unfortunately in the course of negotiating the DDPR final report, allies conceded the issue of replacing the WCDC with an identical body and thereby left open the possibility of duplicating the months already consumed in agreeing a mandate for the WCDC. Sufficient political will on the part of allies, especially the United States, is now the only path forward to achieving a meaningful role for the successor WMD committee. As argued in early May, for example:

“The Chicago summit could decide that the North Atlantic Council, meeting at the level of foreign and defense ministers, should annually receive a report based, for example, on contributions from the new WMD committee and the NPG/HLG on possible changes to NATO’s nuclear posture. The meeting could take place in conjunction with a public seminar on NATO nuclear policy to which major stakeholders are invited and where findings of the reports are debated.”²¹

The opportunity to take such practical action at Chicago has been lost. However, the next meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers will likely be held in December 2012, and would provide a useful opportunity to act on the above suggestion and other possibilities for exercising meaningful political review of NATO’s nuclear posture and policy. When talks begin in earnest between the United States and Russia, the successor WCDC committee could be used by the United States

to consult with allies, and garner support for the next steps in nuclear arms control. It could also be used more actively to consider how Alliance deterrent policy might evolve so as to better strengthen members' non-proliferation objectives.

What next for NATO?

“The review of NATO’s deterrence and defence posture has confirmed that NATO must have the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against threats to the safety of its populations and the security of its territory, which is the Alliance’s greatest responsibility. As outlined above, NATO has determined that, in the current circumstances, the existing mix of capabilities and the plans for their development are sound.”²²

Contrary to the assertions of its leaders in Chicago, the current circumstances will allow neither NATO’s nuclear nor conventional force postures to remain unchanged without placing incredible strains upon Alliance coherence (and very possibly existence). Doing nothing, on either the nuclear sharing or the conventional force planning side, is not an option, and yet this is what NATO chose for the conclusion of its DDPR.

Events in recent years indicate that real change in NATO policy must involve U.S. leadership. NATO has a missile defence system due to the

contributions of one ally – the United States. Prospects for a smaller, leaner and more agile NATO conventional force posture rest with one ally – the United States. Similarly, if NATO’s nuclear posture and policy are to change in any meaningful way, it will require political will and initiative from one ally – the United States. For the United States to consult its allies is responsible leadership, but to allow those allies to block change to the detriment of the Alliance is negligence.

As argued above, the United States should push for specific actions at the next NATO Foreign Ministerial meeting to breathe life into the new WMD control committee. Beyond that, the United States should seek to unravel NATO’s nuclear Gordian knot by arguing in Allied capitals for the withdrawal of B61s from European soil. The reasons for this are spelled out elsewhere,²³ but amount to a simple recognition of the political impossibility of 28 nations ever agreeing to use B61s in anger, a fact implicitly recognised by all allies and by any potential adversary, thus rendering their deterrent and assurance value useless.

NATO’s political mechanisms are deadlocked around the nuclear issue; allowing them to stay that way for much longer risks the very existence of the Alliance. For that reason, the U.S. government must recognise the danger and act soon to save NATO from a nuclear implosion.

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¹ NATO, *Lisbon Summit Declaration*. 20 November 2010. Article 30. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm.

² Ibid.

³ NATO, *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review, (DDPR)*. 20 May 2012. paragraph 1. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm.

⁴ In the NPR, the United States declared that it “is now prepared to strengthen its long-standing ‘negative security assurance’ by declaring that the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.” U.S. Department of Defense (2010). *Nuclear Posture Review Report*. Washington, D.C. p.15. Available at:

<http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20nuclear%20posture%20review%20report.pdf>.

⁵ *NATO Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR)*. op.cit., paragraph 3.

⁶ On 26 February 2010, the foreign ministers of Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway in a joint letter asked NATO Secretary General Rasmussen “to open a comprehensive discussion” on nuclear arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation at the forthcoming Tallinn meeting of foreign ministers. See *Letter by the Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway to NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen*. 26 February 2010. Available at:

<http://www.armscontrol.org/system/files/Letter%20to%20Secretary%20General%20NATO.pdf> and “European Nations Seek NATO Nuclear Debate”, *Global Security Newswire*, 3 March 2010, Available at:

<http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/european-nations-seek-nato-nuclear-debate>.

⁷ Oswald, R., Arms Control Groups Accuse NATO of Keeping Nuclear Status Quo. *Global Security Newswire*, 22 May 2012. Available at: <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/nato-failed-change-nuclear-status-quo-experts>.

⁸ *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 8.

⁹ Seay, E., “Escalation by Default: The Future of NATO Nuclear Weapons in Europe”. European Leadership Network, 10 May 2012. Available at: http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/escalation-by-default-the-future-of-nato-nuclear-weapons-in-europe_380.html.

¹⁰ *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 10.

¹¹ *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 12..

¹² *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 15.

¹³ Burns, R., 10 June 2011. “‘Dim, if not Dismal Future’: Gates Blasts NATO”. Associated Press. Available at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/43351604/ns/world_news-europe/t/dim-if-not-dismal-future-gates-blasts-nato/.

¹⁴ The Brookings Institution, *Air-Sea Battle Doctrine: Discussion with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Chief of Naval Operations*. 16 May 2012. Available at:

http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2012/5/16%20air%20sea%20battle/20120516_air_sea_doctrine_corrected_transcript.pdf.

¹⁵ *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 20.

¹⁶ Ibid, paragraph 19.

¹⁷ Ibid, paragraph 21.

¹⁸ Есин, В. И., 13 Апр. 2012. ЕвроПРО без Мифов и Политики. *Независимая Газета*. Available at: http://www.ng.ru/armament/2012-04-13/1_pro.html, (translated by Google).

¹⁹ *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 22..

²⁰ Ibid, paragraph 30.

²¹ Ingram, P. and Meier, O., “The NATO Summit: Recasting the Debate Over U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe”. *Arms Control Today*, May 2012. Available at:

http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2012_05/The_NATO_Summit_Recasting_the_Debate_Over_US_Nuclear_Weapons_in_Europe.

²² *DDPR*, op.cit., paragraph 31.

²³ Seay, E., “Escalation by Default”, op.cit.