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The Military Role of United States Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe

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DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

During the Cold War, nuclear weapons were central to the U.S. strategy of deterring Soviet aggression against the United States (U.S.) and U.S. allies. Toward this end, the U.S. deployed various systems that could carry nuclear warheads. These included nuclear mines; artillery; short-, medium-, and long-range ballistic missiles; cruise missiles; and gravity bombs. The United States deployed these weapons with its troops in the field, aboard aircraft, on surface ships, submarines, and fixed land-based launchers. The U.S. articulated a complex strategy and developed detailed operational plans that would guide the use of these weapons in the event of a conflict with the Soviet Union and its allies.

This topic is relevant insofar as recent debates about U.S. nuclear weapons have questioned the role of weapons with shorter ranges and lower yields in addressing emerging threats in Europe. These weapons, often referred to as non-strategic nuclear weapons, have not been limited by past U.S. – Russian arms control agreements. Some analysts argue such limits would be of value, particularly in addressing Russia's greater numbers of these types of weapons. Others have argued that the U.S. should expand its deployments of these weapons in Europe to address new risks of war conducted under a nuclear shadow.

These non-strategic nuclear weapons did not completely escape public discussion or arms control debates. Their profile rose in the early 1980s when U.S. plans to deploy new cruise missiles and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Europe, as a part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s nuclear strategy, ignited large public protests in many NATO nations. Discussions about the presence of U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons at bases in Europe and their role in NATO's strategy also increased in 2009 and 2010 during the drafting of NATO's strategic concept. Officials in some NATO nations called for the removal of U.S. non-strategic weapons from bases on the continent, noting that they had no military significance for NATO's security. Others called for the retention of these weapons, arguing that they played a political role in NATO, with shared rights and responsibilities. They helped balance Russia's deployment of greater numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Lastly, this paper will also examine the role of the European Union (EU) as a non-proliferation actor, which Union has carried out several initiatives intended to complement the existing non-proliferation regime in a number of forums over the recent years.



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INTRODUCTION

The term ‘non-strategic nuclear weapon’ (NSNW) includes nuclear warheads for all delivery systems such as gravity bombs for aircraft other than nuclear-capable heavy bombers, nuclear warheads for naval cruise missiles and torpedoes, and nuclear warheads for anti-ballistic missile (ABM) and air defence systems. The NSNWs term would also capture any nuclear warheads for surface-to-surface missiles with less-than-50 kilometres ranges, and nuclear artillery shells.

Those weapons are seen as having virtually no military utility in the context of the full array of nuclear and conventional arms maintained by the U.S. military; their primary value is political, symbolising the U.S. security commitment to Europe. NATO allies hold a range of views on the need for American nuclear weapons deployed in Europe. Some allies, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, see no territorial threat to the Alliance

that requires US nuclear weapons in Europe. Other allies, including the Baltic states and countries in Central Europe, see a continued need for U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe as a means of underscoring the U.S. security commitment to NATO. Their view is shaped by concern that Russia might still threaten their security.

Today, the presence of U.S. NSNWs in Europe is highly debated. While some claim they continue to serve a crucial purpose, others argue they should be withdrawn at once. For example, the former conceive nuclear disarmament as neither realistic nor desirable. The latter believe disarmament should be pursued and could be achieved starting with the retreat of the U.S. NSNWs from Europe, also in the light of the ‘European strategic autonomy’, which goes hand in hand with the concept of European sovereignty.

BACKGROUND

Five countries in the European theatre are currently hosting American NSNWs. The U.S. placed them in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Turkey as a credible deterrent against potential Soviet aggression during the Cold War period. These NSNWs constituted the essence of NATO’s Nuclear Sharing strategy and represented a

concrete commitment on behalf of the U.S. for the defence of its overseas allies.¹

U.S. and Soviet Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons

Through bilateral agreements made in the 1950s and 1960s, Germany, the Netherlands,

1. Credi, Ottavia. 2019. “US Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe Necessary or Obsolete?”, July 2019. American Security Project, [online] Available at: <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ReE0226-US-NSNWs-in-Europe.pdf>

Belgium, Italy, Turkey, Britain, and Greece accepted U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on their territories. It was part of what was known as burden-sharing: dividing the costs and responsibilities of NATO. The number of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe increased from 3,000 in 1960 to 7,000 in 1970. But even then, during the Cold War, the theory and practice of extended nuclear deterrence was criticised because of its perceived lack of credibility. Once the Soviet Union introduced its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in 1960 – a development that many perceived to be a nuclear war endgame – Europeans viewed U.S. tactical weapons as even more futile than before.

The *raison d'être* of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe disappeared with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the implosion of the Soviet Union, and the abolition of the Warsaw Pact. Since 1989, however, the United States has missed various opportunities to withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from Europe; small strides, instead, have pacified governments. The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives between George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 led Russia to eliminate 50 per cent of its warheads for tactical aircraft, and the U.S. reduced its tactical nuclear weapons arsenal from 1,500 to 700. But while Russia removed its tactical weapons in Eastern Europe, the U.S. kept nuclear weapons in Western Europe. In 1993 and 1994, President Bill Clinton sidestepped the withdrawal of U.S. tactical weapons when he released his Nuclear Posture Review (NPR); in the late 1990s, he moved forward with very limited reductions

by consolidating the arsenal across fewer bases in Turkey and Germany.²

Despite the end of the Cold War – and the most significant overhaul in the international political system in half a century – U.S. nuclear weapons remained in Europe as part of NATO's nuclear policy. But the public opinion in host nations showed increased impatience, which grew during the George W. Bush administration when much of Europe viewed the U.S. president and his foreign policy as too unilateralist. Some host nations responded by sending back the U.S. nuclear weapons: Greece in 2001 and Britain in 2004 (leaving, of course, its nuclear arsenal). In February 2010, Germany, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands demanded that the United States remove its tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. Despite this public appeal, Washington has still not responded clearly. Though President Barack Obama considered nuclear disarmament to be one of his foreign policy priorities and has even succeeded in changing U.S. nuclear weapons policy, the topic of tactical nuclear weapons has conspicuously been avoided. The Obama administration justified this oversight by reasoning it was an issue to be discussed with U.S. allies in the NATO Strategic Concept Review framework in November 2010. The U.S. did not want to endanger the ratification of New START in the U.S. Senate. This explanation is justifiable; however, the result is still the same: after waiting 20 years for withdrawal, host nations are aggravated and growing more agitated.

Today, the debate over the removal of tactical

2. Sauer, Tom. 2010. "U.S. tactical nuclear weapons: A European perspective", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, pp. 65-75. [online] Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0096340210381338>

weapons is not a simple one; linked to it are the debates over the utility of NATO and how to reach a global consensus on nuclear disarmament. Advocates of withdrawal regard inaction in the field of tactical nuclear weapons as just one example of general inertia within the alliance; the lack of a severe political discussion inside NATO, they argue, is a cause of concern for the actual value of NATO. The debate has stalled action, resulting in more missed opportunities to remove the weapons from Europe.

The American nuclear weapons in Europe

During the Cold War, amid the tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and the delicate balance dictated by Mutual As-

sured Destruction (MAD), the U.S. deployed thousands of nuclear weapons in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Turkey. Many of these arms were categorised as non-strategic (or tactical) nuclear weapons. While strategic nuclear weapons typically have long-range and large yields, non-strategic nuclear weapons have a shorter range, lower yields, and are intended primarily for battlefield operations. Non-strategic delivery systems tend to carry warheads with smaller yields and are typically fitted for hitting a specific target. Additionally, all treaties that apply to strategic nuclear forces do not concern NSNWs.

In the Cold War period, the Warsaw Pact nations had a palpable numerical superiority of conventional forces. U.S. NSNWs in Europe constituted a fundamental part of NATO's



B61 Nuclear Bombs in Storage

2013

Source: <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2009/11/locations/>

flexible response strategy against these superior numbers. Thus, these weapons represented a deterrent against the enemy's potential willingness to begin a conventionally-armed battle. More importantly, American NSNWs were the essence of the U.S.' extended nuclear deterrence in Europe. By having ready-to-use nuclear weapons on the European continent, the U.S. would have been able to intervene in defence of its European allies if the Soviet Union attempted an attack. Having deployed NSNWs on European territory did not mean the U.S. would have automatically used them to respond to a potential Soviet nuclear attack. It merely meant the U.S. had the option to do so.

Over the last decade, the number of U.S. tactical weapons in Europe has been estimated at 160-200.³ These are B61-3 and B61-4 gravity bombs with destructive power ranging from 0.3 to 170 kilotons. These bombs, ready for delivery by U.S. or NATO aircraft, are deployed in five NATO countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Of these five countries, only three – Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands – are in charge of nuclear strike missions through so-called dual-key arrangements for their national air forces. This means that the weapons remain under U.S. custody in the host nations in times of peace. In times of war, the weapons can be transferred to the host nations, which eventually are supposed to use them. The other two states, Italy and Turkey, which possess two-thirds of the U.S. nuclear weapons based in Europe, host aeroplanes and their respective nuclear weapons as part of the NATO nu-

clear burden-sharing program. The overall size of the U.S. arsenal of operational-tactical nuclear weapons is thought to be approximately 500, with another 800 presumed to be in the inactive stockpile. Russia possesses an estimated 2,500-5,500 tactical nuclear weapons. This number is gradually shrinking because of weapons attrition. These short-range systems do not have a well-defined role in Russian defence policy and can, in principle rather easily, be taken away without undermining Russian national interests.

Recent initiatives to reduce tactical nuclear weapons

By definition, atomic arms are weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which contradicts modern international humanitarian law. The effectiveness (and therefore credibility) of nuclear deterrence has always been questioned because of its disproportionate nature. Each day that nuclear weapons are not used, it becomes more difficult to imagine a day when they will. The norm states that it is immoral and illegitimate to use destructive devices that do not discriminate between military and civilian targets.

Despite the steps that the Russian Federation and the U.S. have taken to reduce the number of tactical nuclear weapons in their arsenals, the countries have not successfully negotiated a legally-binding instrument. The conclusion of New START renewed interest in the topic, and a number of proposals for reductions and confidence-building measures have been put forward.⁴ One idea was advanced in 2011 by

3. Kristensen, Hans M. and Norris, Robert S., 2009. "U.S. Nuclear Forces, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 2009" 65 (2). [online] Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.2968/065002009>

4. Podvig, Pavel and Serrat, Javier "Lock them Up: Zero-deployed Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe". UNIDIR . 2017. [online] Available at: <https://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/lock-them-up-zero-deployed-non-strategic-nuclear-weapons-in-europe-en-675.pdf>

Russia's foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, who, in discussing prospects for cuts of tactical nuclear weapons, advocated for the "withdrawal of these weapons to the territory of the State to which they belong as well as the removal of the infrastructure for their deployment abroad should be regarded as a first step towards the resolution of this problem."⁵

Meanwhile, NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR), adopted at the 2012 summit in Chicago, opens the door to reductions given "reciprocal steps by Russia."⁶ No further details or criteria were spelt out in the DDPR, although alliance members reportedly agreed to task appropriate committees to study Russia's reciprocal steps could be.

Additionally, a year earlier, a group of NATO members advocated for gradual information sharing between the NATO and Russia of numbers, locations, operational status, command arrangements, and security of non-strategic weapons, suggesting that both sides consider an exchange of visits by military officials. Non-governmental experts have also floated several ideas in Europe, Russia, and the United States. A common thread through many of them is an emphasis on confidence-building measures and data exchanges as main pillars. But some of the data exchanges proposed are quite detailed, such as locations of component parts of dismantled warheads. Some of these proposals include a verification component with a degree of intrusiveness, others rely primarily on national technical means,

and others do not include a verification component. There are even proposals that would codify the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) into legally-binding commitments or at least seek to operationalise the initiatives by verifying data exchanges resulting from PNI implementation activities.

Another approach that has garnered some attention and support is the adoption of a single limit, or common ceiling, for all nuclear weapons, including both strategic and tactical. Under this approach, each party would be free to determine the relative mix of strategic and non-strategic weapons in its arsenal. However, implementing this proposal would require accounting for active strategic and non-strategic warheads, data exchange, and probably access to warhead storage facilities. This, of course, has been a serious obstacle in the past. In a 2007 study on the possible elimination of tactical nuclear weapons, Rose Gottemoeller – deputy secretary-general of NATO – articulated some potential approaches to control non-strategic nuclear weapons. These included further unilateral steps by Russia and NATO countries, with NATO withdrawing all weapons back to the U.S. and Russia having the opportunity to visit the bases to check that the nuclear activities at those sites had ceased. Gottemoeller also advanced the idea of a ban on the operational deployment of tactical nuclear weapons and withdrawal of warheads to central storage facilities.

5. Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, 1 March 2011. [online] Available at: [http://www.unog.ch/80256EED2006B8954/\(httpAsses\)/E2C753C466AD602DC1257846005C3761/\\$file/1_211RussianFederation.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EED2006B8954/(httpAsses)/E2C753C466AD602DC1257846005C3761/$file/1_211RussianFederation.pdf).

6. NATO, "Deterrence and Defence Posture Review", 20 May 2012. [online] Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm

The role of NSNWS in US National Security Policy

Like Russia, the U.S. does not disclose how many tactical nuclear weapons it has or where they are deployed. But it does provide information about which weapon types can launch them. Since the end of the Cold War, the US inventory of tactical nuclear weapons has decreased significantly, from roughly 9,000 warheads in 1989⁷ to an estimated 230 today. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review provides this information about US tactical nuclear weapons: “Current U.S. non-strategic nuclear forces consist exclusively of B61 gravity bombs carried by F-15E DCA [dual-capable aircraft], supported by responsive air refueling aircraft. Several NATO allies also provide DCA capable of delivering U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons [...] U.S. and NATO DCA, together with U.S. gravity bombs, are forward deployed in European NATO countries [...] If necessary, the United States has the ability to deploy DCA and nuclear weapons to other regions, such as Northeast Asia”.⁸ Most of the estimated 230 remaining weapons – about 150 B61-3 and four gravity bombs – are thought to be deployed at six bases in five European countries: Aviano AB and Ghedi AB in Italy; Büchel AB in Germany; Incirlik

AB in Turkey; Kleine Brogel AB in Belgium; and Volkel AB in the Netherlands. A portion of the B61 bombs in Europe are earmarked for delivery by aircraft from the NATO allies where the bombs are stored. The remaining 80 weapons are in central storage in the United States.⁹ The number in Europe is thought to have been quietly reduced (from 180) over the past decade because of upgrades to the security perimeters and storage vaults at Aviano AB and Incirlik AB.¹⁰

U.S. modernisation of its tactical nuclear weapons focuses on producing the B61-12 guided nuclear bomb and the F-35A Lightning fifth-generation fighter-bomber. The B61-12 will use the nuclear explosive package of the existing B61-4, which has four selective yields between 0.3 kilotons and 50 kilotons, but it will be equipped with a new guided tail kit to increase accuracy and standoff capability. This will allow strike planners to select lower yields for existing targets to reduce collateral damage. The enhanced accuracy will enable the B61-12 to serve the missions of all nuclear gravity bombs in the arsenal and allow the Air Force to retire all existing bombs. However, the Trump administration has delayed the retirement of one of these, the B83-1.

The B61-12 also appears to have limited earth-penetration capability, which in-

7. SIPRI, 1989. “SIPRI Yearbook 1989”. New York: Oxford University Press. [online] Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/1989>

8. United States Department of Defense. 2018. “Nuclear Posture Review.” February. [online] Available at: <https://uploads.fas.org/media/2018/Nuclear-Posture-Review-Version-2.pdf>

9. Kristensen, Hans. M. 2017. “NATO Nuclear Exercise Underway with Czech and Polish Participation.” FAS Strategic Security Blog, October 17. [online] Available at: <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2017/10/steadfast-noon-exercise/>

10. Kristensen, Hans M. 2015. “Upgrades At US Nuclear Bases In Europe Acknowledge Security Risk.” FAS Strategic Security Blog, September 10. [online] Available at: <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2015/09/nuclear-insecurity/>

creases its ability to hold at risk underground targets.¹¹ The B61-12 will be deployed to Europe beginning in 2022–2024, at which point the older B61-3 and B61-4 bombs will be returned to the United States.

Although many have questioned the continued need to deploy U.S. nuclear weapons, the United States and NATO have retained the mission as a symbol of U.S. protection of NATO. This role has deepened in recent years as relations with Russia have soured, and the U.S. and NATO have reemphasised the role of nuclear weapons in support of the alliance. Although the nuclear sharing arrangement is limited to five countries, allies who do not host U.S. nuclear weapons on their soil can also participate in the nuclear mission as part of conventional support operations, known as SNOWCAT (Support Nuclear Operations with Conventional Air Tactics).

Although the United States has emphasised the continued importance of deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review determined they were insufficient to deter Russian use of tactical nuclear weapons. New nuclear supplements were needed: a low-yield warhead for the Trident II D5LE submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) and a new nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) explicitly for the purpose of “enhancing deterrence with non-strategic nuclear capabilities.”¹²

“Unlike (dual-capable aircraft),” the NPR explained, “a low-yield SLBM warhead and

SLCM will not require or rely on host nation support to provide deterrent effect. They will provide additional diversity in platforms, range, and survivability, and a valuable hedge against future nuclear ‘break out’ scenarios.”¹³ The low-yield warhead, known as W76-2, is needed to “ensure a prompt response option that is able to penetrate adversary defenses.”¹⁴ The SLCM is needed to “provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability. It also will provide an arms control-compliant response to Russia’s non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and its other destabilising behaviours.”¹⁵ The new weapons will “provide a diverse set of characteristics enhancing our ability to tailor deterrence and assurance” and “expand the range of credible U.S. options for responding to nuclear or non-nuclear strategic attack”.¹⁶

The idea to deploy a low-yield W76-2 warhead on strategic Trident submarines for potential use as a quick-strike tactical nuclear weapon early in a conflict appears to blur the line between tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. Moreover, given that the U.S. Navy already has high-yield warheads on its Trident warheads that could be used in a response, the decision to add a low-yield warhead suggests an interest in using the new weapon more readily because it would create less radioactive fallout. The new weapons are needed, the NPR claims, to “help counter any mistaken

11. Kristensen, Hans M., and McKinzie, Matthew 2016. “Video Shows Earth-Penetrating Capability of B61-12 Nuclear Bomb.” FAS Strategic Security Blog, January 14. [online] Available at:

https://fas.org/blogs/security/2016/01/b61-12_earth-penetration/

12. United States Department of Defense. 2018. “Global Nuclear Capability Modernization: Global Nuclear-Capable Delivery Vehicles.” February 2. [online] Available at: https://media.defense.gov/2018/02/20/2001872878/E-1-171/GLOBAL_NUCLEAR-MODERNIZATION.PDF

13. United States Department of Defense. 2018. “Nuclear Posture Review.” February. [online] Available at: <https://uploads.fas.org/media/2018-Nuclear-Posture-Review-Version-2.pdf>

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

perception of an exploitable ‘gap’ in US regional deterrence capabilities.¹⁷ There is no evidence that Russia doubts the U.S. resolve to retaliate if attacked. Moscow believes the United States would be “self-deterred” from retaliating if it does not have these new low-yield tactical weapons. Russian planners are likely aware that the US arsenal already includes around 1,000 gravity bombs and air-launched cruise missiles with low-yield warhead options¹⁸ and that roughly 150 of those are already deployed in Europe.

The Trump administration’s efforts to revitalise the role of tactical nuclear weapons in U.S. military strategy coincided with the brief publication in June 2019 of a new Joint Chiefs of Staff nuclear weapons doctrine that appeared to emphasise the battlefield use of nuclear weapons:¹⁹ “Integration of nuclear weapons into a theatre of operations requires the consideration of multiple variables. Using nuclear weapons could create conditions for decisive results and restore strategic stability. Specifically, the use of a nuclear weapon will fundamentally change the scope of a battle and create conditions that affect how commanders will prevail in conflict”.²⁰

The role of NSNWs in the NATO strategy

Several experts claim U.S. NSNWs in Europe

do not play a military role anymore. However, Russia’s strategy continues to be built on its “perception of Western weakness and hesitation.”²¹ Therefore, leaving NATO’s European allies without an appropriate American-linked nuclear deterrent would be incautious. NATO is, above all, a military alliance. And despite what some may state, it is as relevant today as when it was first conceived. Due to their geographical proximity to some of Russia’s NSNWs,²² Poland and the Baltic states still feel very much threatened by the possibility of Russian nuclear aggression. Russia has privately declared that in the event of a war with a NATO state, it would be willing to bring a potential conflict to a nuclear level. Having U.S. NSNWs in Europe makes these countries feel safe, reassuring them of the U.S.’ seriousness in its commitment to NATO’s Article 5.

Lately, there has been a lot of speculation of a possible Russian military strategy better known as the “escalate to de-escalate” doctrine.²³ According to this strategy, Russia might be planning on employing a nuclear weapon, possibly a small one, to heat a conflict to a point where the parties involved decide to retreat rather than risk each other’s annihilation. Considering such a threatening scenario, all members of the Atlantic Alliance need to present themselves as countries willing and capable of responding to a potential nuclear escalation. That being said, Europe

17. Ibid.

18. Kristensen, Hans M. 2017. “The Flawed Push For New Nuclear Weapons Capabilities.” FAS Strategic Security Blog, June 29. [online] Available at:

<https://fas.org/blogs/security/2017/06/new-nukes/>

19. Aftergood, Steven. 2019. “DoD Doctrine on Nuclear Operations Published, Taken Offline.” FAS Secrecy News Blog, June 19. [online] Available at:

<https://fas.org/blogs/secrecy/2019/06/nuclear-operations/>

20. Joint Chiefs of Staff. 2019b. “Nuclear Operations.” Joint Publication 3–72, June 11. [online] Available at:

https://ftp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp3_72.pdf

21. Wimmer, Felix. 2018. “European nuclear deterrence in the era of Putin and Trump.” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. 8 January 2018. [online] Available at:

<https://thebulletin.org/2018/01/european-nuclear-deterrence-in-the-era-of-putin-and-trump/>

22. Ivanov, Igor; Ischinger, Wolfgang; Nunn, Sam. 2012. “Addressing Nonstrategic Nuclear Forces.” Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative. February 2012. [online] Available at:

https://carnegieendowment.org/files/WGP_AddressingNSNW_FINAL.pdf

23. Stowell, Joshua. 2018. “Escalate to De-Escalate: Russia’s Nuclear Deterrence Strategy.” Global Security Review. 20 August 2018. [online] Available at:

<https://globalsecurityreview.com/nuclear-de-escalation-russias-deterrence-strategy/>

doesn't need as many NSNWs as it is currently hosting to achieve this goal.

In a press release from 1995, the NATO Defense Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group wrote that the presence of deployable non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe contributed to "Alliance solidarity, common commitment, and strategic unity."²⁴

The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review lists the cohesion within the Atlantic Alliance and the element of mutual reassurance among the primary reasons for keeping American NSNWs on the European territory. In such a context, then-President Obama stated it is important the U.S. "continue[s] to assure [its] allies and partners of [its] commitment to their security."²⁵ Despite the general euphoria that followed NATO's 70th-anniversary celebrations, today, confidence in the Atlantic Alliance is not as strong as one might think. Five years ago, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated, "The times in which we can fully count on others are somewhat over."²⁶ Such a statement clearly shows a disenchanting attitude towards the Alliance, whose sense of cohesion urgently needs to be reaffirmed. A B-61 training mock-up in the Netherlands in 2008.

During his presidential campaign, President Trump repeatedly questioned the U.S.' relationship with NATO and the overall value of the Atlantic Alliance itself. He did so several times during his presidency as well. What is sure is that U.S.' NSNWs in Europe contribute to a common sense of shared rights and responsibility within the Atlantic Alliance.

Nuclear weapons, and their sharing among NATO's allies, are the foundation of NATO's solidarity. When the U.S.' solidarity with Europe is in question, it seems dangerous to take this guarantee away in its entirety. As long as such cohesion is maintained, American NSNWs in Europe will continue to serve their purpose of keeping peace and preventing wars.

Political and military role of NSNWs for the European Union

With Russia's annexation of Crimea and increased uncertainty about Washington's security commitments, EU nuclear deterrence has reappeared on the political agenda. With the United Kingdom now outside the EU, the spotlight is on France as the only remaining European nuclear-weapon state.²⁷

On 7 February 2020, President Macron, in a long-awaited speech at the Ecole de Guerre in Paris, stated that the French nuclear forces "strengthen the security of Europe through their very existence" and proposed to have a "strategic dialogue" with the EU partners about the role of the French nuclear weapons in European security.²⁸ Although the EU is not a state, it has many characteristics of a state: it has a territory with open borders in the Schengen zone; a population (= combination of the people of the EU member states, which all have a European passport); it speaks with one voice on trade policy, it has a research, industrial, and social policy, and more. In addition, the EU has its currency

24. NATO Press Communiqué M-DPC/NPG-2(95)117. 29 November 1995. [online] Available at: <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1995/p95-117.htm>, par. 21.

25. United States Department of Defense. "2010 Nuclear Posture Review." April 6, 2010. [777468](https://www.dodig.mil/reports-and-statements/2010-nuclear-posture-review)

26. The Daily Beast. "Merkel: Europe Can No Longer 'Count on Others.'" 28 May 2017. [online] Available at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/cheats/2017/05/28/merkel-europe-can-no-longer-count-on-others>

27. Meier, Oliver. 2020. "Liability or asset? The EU and nuclear weapons", June 16, 2020. [online] Available at: <https://spectator.dingendael.org/en/publication/liability-or-asset-eu-and-nuclear-weapons>

28. Macron, Emmanuel. 2020. "Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy." Paris, Ecole de Guerre, 7th of February. [online] Available at: <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy>

(limited to the eurozone). Since the Treaty of Maastricht, it has even a common foreign and security (including defence) policy, although still inter-governmental and therefore less important than the national foreign policies, especially those of the larger EU states. Nevertheless, European defence integration is slowly deepening. The 2016 EU Global Strategy talks about “strategic autonomy”.²⁹ The European Commission, already under Juncker, spent money on joint defence industrial projects via the European Defence Fund (EDF). Under the heading of Ursula von der Leyen, the current European Commission has even more ambitious goals.³⁰

The EU is generally regarded as a soft or “normative” power.³¹ While the original goal of the European project in the 1950s was maintaining peace, its main instrument was economic cooperation. That said, already in 1952, the European Defence Community was set up, only to be vetoed by the French Assembly two years later.

It is probably no coincidence that French Prime Minister Mendès-France started up a secret nuclear weapons program in the same period. Jean Monnet – one of the founding fathers of the European Community – was against the force de frappe because, in his view, it was incompatible with the fact that Germany was constitutionally not allowed to possess nuclear weapons. Since then, European integration has made progress on a step-

by-step basis, including the establishment of the European Economic Community and Euratom in 1957, the latter aiming to create a European free zone for nuclear fuel, i.e. uranium. Unsurprisingly, Europe was called “a civilian power”.³²

Later on, Manners triggered a lively academic debate describing the EU as “a normative power”. He argued: “This combination of historical context, hybrid polity and legal constitution has, in the post-cold war period, accelerated a commitment to placing universal norms and principles at the centre of its relations with its member states and the world”.³³ That said, since the end of the Cold War, steps have been taken to give body to a Common Foreign and Security Policy, including in the field of defence. For instance, Javier Solana, Catherine Ashton, Federica Mogherini, and Joseph Borell have taken up the position of High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, leading the European External Action Service. An EU Military Committee aided by an EU Military Staff has been set up in Brussels. The EU initiated both civilian and military interventions, be it low-risk, worldwide. A European Defence Agency (EDA) and a European Defence Fund (EDF) have been created. It was also the E(U)-3 that negotiated a deal with Iran in 2003, and that was successful in coordinating the multilateral talks that led to the Joint Common Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015.³⁴ The Lisbon Trea-

29. European Union Global Strategy, 2016. [online] Available at: https://eais.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

30. Sauer, Tom. 2019. “Power and Nuclear Weapons: The Case of the European Union”, December 30, 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/25751654.2020.1764260?needAccess=true>

31. Manners, Ian, 2002. “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2): 235–258.

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[online] Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12861>

That said, there have been two instances in the post-Cold War period when the debate about a possible Euro-bomb got traction: first of all, after the French nuclear weapons tests

in 1995, and secondly, after Trump's election in 2016, supporting the hypothesis that advocates regard the Euro-bomb more as a political than a defence project.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A “NON-PROLIFERATION ACTOR”

Towards a European non-proliferation policy?

Nuclear non-proliferation has long been absent from the political agenda of the EU. Over twenty years, the EU has begun taking steps against the spread of nuclear weapons within its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), focusing mainly on promoting the universalisation of treaties, transparency in export controls, and some regional initiatives. The emergence of an EU non-proliferation role has taken place, notwithstanding notable disparities between the positions of the Member States. Nevertheless, neither the objectives set have been ambitious, nor have they been pursued vigorously. Notably, they have never been part of a coordinated strategy. In recent years the need for the EU to enhance its role as a non-proliferation actor has increased dramatically. Firstly, the U.S. has effectively relinquished its leadership in arms control and adopted alternative methods to avert the spread of WMD.

This makes it necessary for other actors willing to uphold the existing regime to upgrade their efforts. Secondly, particularly in the aftermath of 11 September, the proliferation threat is

no longer seen in terms of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by states but also by terrorist organisations. Although the 9/11 attacks did not involve the use of WMD, claims by Al-Qaida to own nuclear weapons have put this concern at the centre of the international agenda. Finally, the invasion of Iraq, largely justified based on allegations that it was running an active WMD programme, has placed proliferation at the centre of public attention. All this is increasingly compelling the EU to frame some effective policies to avert the spread of nuclear weapons. At the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003, the European Council responded by adopting its first Strategy against the proliferation of WMD. This is by far the most comprehensive and detailed document on non-proliferation ever issued by the EU.³⁷

The EU is not a unitary actor in the nuclear non-proliferation domain, being mainly constrained by the diversity of its members' positions regarding nuclear weapons on the one hand and the transatlantic link on the other. One of the strands of EU action has consisted in taking initiatives aimed at strengthening the existing regime at multilateral forums. They have been geared predominantly to the

37. Portela, Clara. "The Role of the EU in the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: The Way to Thessaloniki and Beyond". Peace Research Institute Frankfurt Report No. 65. [online] Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/28700/prifrep65.pdf>

universalisation of treaties and the multilateralisation of arrangements. Examples include promoting the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the adoption of a Code of Conduct on ballistic missile proliferation. The EU performs increasingly well at multilateral venues, which offer a favourable framework for internal coordination.³⁸

The effectiveness of the Union's action remains limited, though. Insufficient means to accomplish the stated objectives account for that. Furthermore, this policy remains selective in nature, addressing some issues while marginalising others.

Another significant strand of action consists of the Union's approaches to regional proliferation crises. In this domain, the EU has a predominantly negative record. It is significantly involved in nuclear-related assistance programmes to Russia in the form of Co-operative Threat Reduction (CTR) efforts. Additionally, the Union facilitated Ukraine's renunciation of nuclear weapons through the ratification of the Lisbon Protocol. However, the EU has had difficulties framing responses to some of the most acute proliferation crises of the past decades. The example of Iraq serves as an illustration of intra-European disagreement on how to tackle proliferation. The reaction to the Indian/Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998 was hardly noticeable.

In general, the EU's approach to avert proliferation is characterised by a tendency to take a comprehensive approach to reduce regional tensions and, in most cases, to follow

U.S.-crafted responses.

Despite the enhancement of its action during the last decade, the EU is still ineffective as a non-proliferation actor. The Union's selective approach has privileged non-proliferation over disarmament, and even within the non-proliferation realm, it has emphasised some issues and regions to the detriment of others. The virtual absence of policies directly focused on addressing proliferation constitutes a further difficulty. Finally, the EU does not yet make effective and concerted use of the means at its disposal.

The EU strategy for non-proliferation

At the Thessaloniki Summit, the European Council adopted a Declaration on the Proliferation of WMD and a set of "Basic Principles for an EU Strategy against Proliferation of WMD" and its corresponding "Action Plan".³⁹ These documents originated in a Council decision dating back to April 2002, which was taken within the framework of the fight against terrorism.

Broadly speaking, the Union will be guided by the following primary objectives: the universalisation of disarmament and non-proliferation agreements; the enhancement of the effectiveness of inspection/verification mechanisms, especially by improving the detectability of violations, and the strengthening of export control policies.

The initiatives presented in the Action Plan include some institutional measures designed to upgrade the capacity of action of the Union, the strengthening of EU internal legislation

38. *Ibid.*

39. EU Strategy against proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2003. [online] Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/council%20wmd%20strategy%2015708_/council%20wmd%20strategy%2015708_en.pdf

and a few proposals for EU external action. Overall, the Strategy's principal emphasis is placed on enhancing the effectiveness of the existing regimes rather than in launching new steps to expand the non-proliferation agenda. At the level of means, the Union first reaffirms its current policy, i.e. "to contain proliferation while dealing with its underlying causes".⁴⁰ The principal novelty is that the Strategy also introduces new instruments. It envisages the introduction of a policy of "sticks and carrots"⁴¹ that links non-proliferation commitments to cooperation agreements or assistance programmes into the EU's relations with third countries. Political and economic levers are included in the list of instruments the Union can avail itself of. Finally, the strategy also foresees the use of force as a measure of last resort, which constitutes an absolute breakthrough. The Strategy offers some potential for the EU to make a relevant contribution to the non-proliferation regime, especially since it has framed some answers as to how to deal with non-cooperative states. To realise this potential, it is suggested that the Union considers a series of issues in further developing the strategy. Firstly, it should

ensure that non-proliferation objectives are adequately mainstreamed into the Union's external relations. To this end, it should concretise the proposed "sticks and carrots"⁴² model into a clear conditionality framework with a Non-Proliferation Clause analogous to the Human rights clauses already applied by the Community in its relations with Third Countries. Secondly, the EU should further enhance its capacity to act by implementing an "internal think tank"⁴³ to craft further non-proliferation initiatives. As far as possible, it should find a satisfactory "division of labour"⁴⁴ with the US in the resolution of proliferation crises, complementing US initiatives with other means rather than merely endorsing them financially. Finally, it should also try to adopt a balanced approach capable of engaging the non-Western as well as the Western world. This includes facilitating the access of Third World countries to civilian nuclear technology, clearly linking forcible counter-proliferation action to a United Nations Security Council mandate, and, most importantly, introducing disarmament measures into the strategy.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. and the Russian Federation (and before the Soviet Union) have long acknowledged the immense security benefits of nuclear arms control. Through the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, both States

eliminated an entire class of weapons. In addition, thousands of warheads have been removed from service under the START and New START accords. Yet, despite significant reductions in their strategic nuclear arsenals,

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

strengths in international crisis prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict stabilisation efforts. When the EU addresses security-related nuclear issues, it is mostly in efforts to contain the spread of nuclear weapons or improve the safety and security of nuclear installations. A European nuclear deterrent could take a number of shapes. At one end of the spectrum might be loose policy coordination through the kind of strategic dialogue suggested by Macron. The other extreme would be a single nuclear force under an integrated European command. Then, the second and challenging question of how Europeans would agree on what and whom nuclear weapons should deter. Nuclear deterrence – and particularly extended nuclear deterrence – brings with it a multitude of dilemmas. Third, there are legal hurdles for a European nuclear deterrent. The core purpose of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is to restrict the access of non-nuclear-weapon states to nuclear weapons. All EU and Alliance member states are NPT parties. Fourth, Europeans hold very different ideas about nuclear weapons' role in international security. EU member states include support-

ers of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, such as Austria, but also staunch deterrence believers, with France at the forefront.

Fifth, giving the EU's foreign and security policy a nuclear dimension is likely to change the character of the Union and its role in the nuclear order. European policy-making procedures may often be convoluted, but they facilitate horizontal coalition-building. Nuclear weapons decision-making, by contrast, is intrinsically hierarchical and secretive. Globally, a nuclear-armed EU would be less legitimate in advocating nuclear abstinence and disarmament. It seems inevitable that the Union's role on the world stage would be more militaristic.

For the time being, it might therefore be more pragmatic to initiate a serious dialogue on how Europeans might shape the nuclear order without going down the road towards a Euro-deterrent. Indeed, by going nuclear, Europe will simply aggravate the arms control crisis where it should be looking for ways to strengthen multilateralism.⁴⁶

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