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Yost, David S.

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Assurance and US extended deterrence in NATO

DAVID S. YOST*

The NATO allies agreed at the Strasbourg/Kehl summit in April 2009 to prepare a new Strategic Concept for approval at their next summit. One of the issues in the Strategic Concept review will be the alliance's nuclear deterrence posture and policy. While three members of the alliance (Britain, France and the United States) are nuclear powers, historically the greatest amount of attention has been focused on US 'extended deterrence'—that is, the extension by Washington of an umbrella of protection, sometimes called a 'nuclear guarantee', to its allies. The history of NATO during the Cold War can be told as essentially a series of debates among the allies about the requirements of extended deterrence.

During the Cold War these requirements concerned not only what might be necessary to deter the Soviet Union from undertaking aggression or coercion, but also what could satisfy the allies about the reliability and credibility of US extended deterrence. The latter aspect of the question was known during the Cold War as 'reassurance', particularly after Michael Howard popularized the word in his classic 1982 article 'Reassurance and deterrence'.¹ In recent years the US government has called this function of its defence posture—communicating a credible message of confidence in the dependability of its security commitments—simply 'assurance'.

As a point of departure, this article critically examines the definition of 'assurance' used by the US Department of Defense for most of the past decade—the definition advanced in the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review—and argues that it has drawn attention to longstanding policy challenges associated with nuclear deterrence, including the US extended deterrence commitment to the NATO allies. The article then considers the historical and current assurance roles of US nuclear forces in Europe, as well as the elements of assurance in Washington's relations with its NATO allies regarding extended nuclear deterrence. The

* The views expressed are the author's alone and do not represent those of the Department of the Navy or any US government agency. Thanks are owed to those who commented on earlier drafts of this article, including Dominic Arpin, Nigel Basing, Giuseppe Cornacchia, Thérèse Delpech, Muriel Domenach, Emanuele Farruggia, Kurt Guthe, David Hamon, Pierre Hassner, Christoffer Jonker, Frank Kupferschmidt, Pierre Lépine, Simon Lunn, Jonathan Parish, Kestutis Paulauskas, Joseph Pilat, Henning Riecke, Alberto Rosso, Michael Rühle, Diego Ruiz Palmer, David Shilling, Bruno Tertrais, Henk Cor van der Kwast, Harold Van Pee and Roberto Zadra, as well as an anonymous reviewer for *International Affairs*.

¹ Michael Howard, 'Reassurance and deterrence: western defense in the 1980s', *Foreign Affairs* 61: 2, Winter 1982–3.

current US nuclear presence in Europe consists of B-61 gravity bombs that could be delivered by US and allied dual-capable aircraft. Why the alliance chose to retain these weapons in 1991, when some 80 per cent of the US nuclear weapons then remaining in Europe were withdrawn,² deserves consideration.

Whether the allies will retain the current definition of the requirements of extended deterrence and assurance in the new Strategic Concept or devise another approach will be an issue of capital importance in the policy review launched at the Strasbourg/Kehl summit. Contrasting approaches to these questions are visible in the United States and Germany, among other allies. The main issues to be resolved include reconciling extended deterrence with arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation priorities; managing the divisions in public and expert opinion; and avoiding certain potential consequences of a rupture with established arrangements.

Assurance in the 2001 QDR and NATO nuclear policy

The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review defined the ‘assurance’ of allies and security partners as one of Washington’s four defence policy goals. The other three goals were to shape the security environment through the ‘dissuasion’ of possible competitors; to ‘deter’ adversaries; and, if necessary, to ‘defeat’ adversaries. The 2001 QDR indicated that in order to provide ‘assurance’ that the United States ‘will honor its obligations and will be a reliable security partner’, the US military will promote cooperation with allies and security partners and help them ‘create favorable balances of military power in critical areas of the world to deter aggression or coercion’.³

In other words, the ability to assure was defined as a function of the perceived ability to deter. It is generally agreed that the ability to deter derives from one or both of two forms of deterrence: a threat of punishment and/or a threat of denial. Denial means being able to deny the enemy the achievement of his operational objectives—as, for example, effective missile defences might intercept and foil a missile attack.

In practice, making national and alliance policy has long been more complex than such a simple summary of these QDR principles suggests. Nuclear weapons in particular illustrate the complexity of defining the requirements of assurance. Denis Healey, Britain’s defence minister in the late 1960s, formulated what he called ‘The Healey Theorem’ in order to underscore the difficulty of the assurance aspect of extended deterrence—that is, ‘it takes only five per cent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians, but ninety-five per cent credibility to reassure the Europeans’.⁴

The QDR framework of analysis, including its definition of ‘assurance’, has focused attention on longstanding policy challenges associated with nuclear

² ‘The total reduction in the current NATO stockpile of sub-strategic weapons in Europe will be roughly 80%’. NATO Nuclear Planning Group, final communiqué, 17–18 October 1991, para. 5.

³ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington DC: US Department of Defense, 30 Sept. 2001), p. 11.

⁴ Denis Healey, *The time of my life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p. 243.

deterrence and NATO policy. Two points stand out with reference to offering extended deterrence protection or 'nuclear guarantees' to the NATO allies. First, the topmost priority in NATO nuclear arrangements has historically been war prevention or, that failing, crisis management and a prompt restoration of the security and integrity of the NATO area. The QDR 'dissuasion' and 'defeat' goals have received little attention in the nuclear domain in NATO. Indeed, given the potential destructiveness of a nuclear war with a major-power adversary, the NATO allies appear to have collectively given no consideration to objectives approximating the 'defeat' goal for decades;⁵ and the foremost objectives have remained deterrence and war prevention.

It is noteworthy in this regard that the call in MC14/3, NATO's fundamental strategy document from 1967 to 1991, for 'direct defence ... to defeat the aggression on the level at which the enemy chooses to fight', stipulated that 'successful direct defence either defeats the aggression or places upon the aggressor the burden of escalation'. On the NATO side escalation could have involved, among other options, 'selective nuclear strikes'. However, the allies agreed, 'The first objective would be to counter the aggression without escalation and preserve or restore the integrity and security of the North Atlantic area'.⁶ In other words, during much of the Cold War the alliance limited its objectives in the event of war to self-defence and the restoration of deterrence and the *status quo ante*, and NATO did not entertain a 'defeat' goal in the classical sense of defeating the adversary's armed forces and compelling a surrender and corresponding political and territorial settlement to the advantage of the victor.

The QDR notion of 'favorable balances of military power in critical areas of the world to deter aggression or coercion' has also been disregarded in the nuclear area in the Euro-Atlantic region. The United States has repeatedly acknowledged this with respect to non-strategic nuclear weapons: as Donald Rumsfeld, then Secretary of Defense, said in 2002, 'The Russians unquestionably have many multiples of what we have, I mean thousands and thousands.'⁷ Furthermore, the parity principle has been consistently upheld in nuclear arms control treaties between Moscow and Washington since the 1972 SALT agreements.

The second distinctive point relates to the assurance aspect of US extended deterrence in NATO. Because the non-nuclear-weapon-state NATO allies have depended on the United States for their nuclear protection to a high degree, many of NATO's nuclear arrangements, such as its consultation mechanisms, have been

⁵ For a valuable discussion of this point, as well as the alliance's commitment to prompt war-termination, see Sir Michael Quinlan, *Thinking about nuclear weapons: principles, problems, prospects* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 37–38. See also *ibid.*, pp. 10–11, 41–45.

⁶ MC 14/3, 'Overall strategic concept for the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization area', approved by the Defence Planning Committee in ministerial session on 12 December 1967, in Gregory W. Pedlow, ed., *NATO strategy documents 1949–1969* (Brussels: National Information Service, 1997), pp. 345–70, paras 17a, 17b, 22a.

⁷ Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, testimony as delivered for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee regarding the Moscow Treaty, 17 July 2002, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches.aspx?speechid=270>, accessed 20 May 2009. For background on some enduring issues associated with these Russian capabilities, see David S. Yost, 'Russia's non-strategic nuclear forces', *International Affairs* 77: 3, July 2001, pp. 531–551.

designed to reassure these allies about their ability to monitor and influence US decision-making as well as about the alliance's capacity to deal effectively with external threats. The arrangements have included mechanisms for the participation of non-nuclear-weapon states in the alliance's nuclear posture as well as ongoing analysis and planning forums to assure the allies that they are partners in the formulation of a shared alliance strategy.

At the end of the Cold War, a decade before the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review popularized the phrase 'capabilities-based', NATO's nuclear policy departed from a threat-based approach. Volker Rühle, then the German defence minister, told the press after the October 1992 meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG): 'There are no more nuclear weapons aimed at any concrete threat.'⁸ The allies collectively announced in the 1999 Strategic Concept: 'NATO's nuclear forces no longer target any country.'⁹ Owing in large part to President George H. W. Bush's initiatives in 1991, the US nuclear presence in Europe was drastically reduced, with the removal of all ground-based shorter-range systems. As noted above, the current US nuclear posture in Europe consists solely of dual-capable aircraft and gravity bombs.¹⁰

Inferences about current views concerning the requirements of assurance can be made from the declaratory policies of the allies and their operational practices. The 1999 Strategic Concept articulated longstanding views about what is necessary for assurance, including 'widespread participation by European allies involved in collective defence planning in nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces on their territory and in command, control and consultation arrangements'.¹¹ While all the allies except France participate in NPG and other alliance nuclear consultations, the practical significance of the concept of 'widespread participation ... in peacetime basing of nuclear forces' has changed, and is continuing to change, with NATO enlargement. The number of allies accepting such responsibilities is a shrinking proportion of the total.

Because NATO has not identified targets for its nuclear forces since the 1990s, it is a challenge to specify and analyse the 1999 Strategic Concept's requirement for 'adequate nuclear forces in Europe ... at the minimum level sufficient to preserve peace and stability'. The minimum level may derive more from judgements about an appropriate level of risk- and responsibility-sharing among allies, and about what is necessary to demonstrate continuing US engagement and commitment, than from a quantitative analysis of potential contingencies. The continuing requirements of assurance in the nuclear domain deserve analysis, and not only

⁸ Rühle cited in Michael Evans, 'NATO says farewell to nuclear conflict', *The Times*, 21 Oct. 1992.

⁹ North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, para. 64. The NATO statement was preceded by similar statements by Britain, Russia, and the United States in 1994, and by France in 1997. On 1 May 2000, at the NPT Review Conference, Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States made the following statement: 'Emphasising the essential importance of cooperation, demonstrating and advancing mutual trust among ourselves, and promoting greater international security and stability, we declare that none of our nuclear weapons are targeted at any State.'

¹⁰ For background, see David S. Yost, *The US and nuclear deterrence in Europe*, Adelphi Paper 326 (London: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 1999).

¹¹ North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, para. 63. The formula 'European Allies involved in collective defense planning' excludes France.

because they relate to the alliance's non-proliferation goals.

This article considers the 'why' issues—the probable purposes and roles of US nuclear forces in Europe with respect to assurance—before turning to the 'how' issues: the various elements that appear to contribute to a credible and effective posture for assurance.

Continuing assurance roles for US nuclear forces in Europe

The assurance roles for US nuclear forces in Europe appear to include the following: to serve as a hedge against Russian recidivism; to deter regional powers armed with weapons of mass destruction (WMD); to provide an alternative to considering dependence on French and/or British nuclear forces; to offer an alternative to the pursuit of national nuclear forces; and to supply evidence of the genuineness of US commitments. Each of these roles deserves a brief discussion.

Hedge against Russian recidivism

The alliance's 1999 Strategic Concept dropped the 'strategic balance' language concerning NATO–Russia relations found in the 1991 Strategic Concept. It nonetheless included subtle references to the alliance's continuing responsibility to hedge against the risk of backsliding in Moscow, given Russia's long-term power potential, particularly its nuclear forces:

Notwithstanding positive developments in the strategic environment and the fact that large-scale conventional aggression against the alliance is highly unlikely, the possibility of such a threat emerging over the longer term exists . . . The existence of powerful nuclear forces outside the alliance also constitutes a significant factor which the alliance has to take into account if security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area are to be maintained.¹²

In July 2002 Colin Powell, then the US Secretary of State, offered a rare public acknowledgement that one of the factors defining the US nuclear posture must be the continuing need for a hedge against potential adverse developments in Russia. In Powell's words, 'there are nuclear-armed nations out there, particularly Russia, [and] even though it is a new relationship, a new partnership—they will have nuclear weapons for many, many years to come, and one cannot predict the future with certainty. So therefore it is wise for us, in view of that . . . to give us a hedge.'¹³ It is noteworthy that US President Barack Obama included a reaffirmation of US extended deterrence commitments in his speech on nuclear disarmament in Prague in April 2009: 'As long as these [nuclear] weapons exist, the United States will

¹² North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, paras 20 and 21. Some allied observers have pointed out that the phrase 'powerful nuclear forces outside the alliance' could refer to China as well as Russia.

¹³ Secretary of State Colin Powell, testimony on 9 July 2002, in *Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reduction: the Moscow Treaty*, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 107th Congress, 2nd Session, July 9, 17, 23 and September 12, 2002 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2002), p. 41, available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107_senate_hearings&docid=f:81339.pdf, accessed 21 May 2009.

maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies—including the Czech Republic.’¹⁴

The role of the alliance’s nuclear posture as a ‘hedge against Russian backsliding’ is generally not explicitly articulated in public statements by NATO or its member nations in part because of the interest in promoting cooperation with Russia in various areas, including the campaigns against terrorism and WMD proliferation. However, this rationale remains pertinent and meaningful to allies, despite differences in threat assessments. Allies in Eastern and Central Europe are especially concerned about trends in Russia towards more authoritarian and assertive rule. Russian officials have declared that certain new allies have made themselves potential targets for nuclear attack by supporting US missile defence plans.¹⁵ The NATO allies have agreed that Moscow’s use of force against Georgia in August 2008 was ‘disproportionate and inconsistent with its peacekeeping role, as well as incompatible with the principles of peaceful conflict resolution set out in the Helsinki Final Act, the NATO–Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration’.¹⁶ Officials of various allied nations have expressed concerns, though they have been cautious in their public remarks. For example, in December 2008 the President of Estonia affirmed the need for NATO’s deterrent posture in the light of the August 2008 Georgia–Russia conflict without explicitly mentioning that conflict:

The fact that NATO is serious about its security has proved to be a powerful deterrent. Indeed, only an actor as irrational as Al Qaeda has dared to gamble with an attack against the world’s strongest conventional, nuclear, economic, and political organization ... As this summer showed us, the reasons for NATO have not disappeared, but have in fact returned, if not with a vengeance, then certainly with a strong taste of *revanche*.¹⁷

Deterrence of WMD proliferants

According to the April 1999 Strategic Concept,

The Alliance’s forces ... contribute to the preservation of peace, to the safeguarding of common security interests of Alliance members, and to the maintenance of the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area. By deterring the use of NBC [nuclear, chemical, and biological] weapons, they contribute to Alliance efforts aimed at preventing the proliferation of these weapons and their delivery means.¹⁸

¹⁴ Remarks by President Barack Obama, Prague, Czech Republic, 5 April 2009, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/, accessed 20 May 2009.

¹⁵ See, among other examples, the statement by Colonel General Anatoly Nogovitsyn, the deputy chief of Russia’s General Staff, quoted in Damien McElroy, ‘Russian general says Poland a nuclear “target”’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 2008, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/2564639/Russian-general-says-Poland-a-nuclear-target-as-Condoleezza-Rice-arrives-in-Georgia.htm>, accessed 19 May 2009. Russian statements regarding possible deployment of the dual capable Iskander missile in Kaliningrad are also significant in this respect.

¹⁶ Statement of the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, on 19 August 2008, NATO Press Release (2008) 104, available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-104e.html>, accessed 20 May 2009.

¹⁷ President Toomas Hendrik Ilves of Estonia, ‘NATO in Estonia, Estonia in NATO: our common security in the 21st century’, Helsinki, 1 Dec. 2008, available at <http://www.president.ee/en/duties/speeches.php?gid=122740>, accessed 20 May 2009.

¹⁸ North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, para. 41.

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If it is reasonable to presume that the alliance's forces include its nuclear forces, the deterrence of WMD proliferants constitutes a second assurance function of US nuclear forces in Europe. Statements to this effect have been made by officials of allied governments since the early 1990s. For example, in 1992 the German Defence Minister, Volker Rühle, declared that 'These [nuclear] weapons insure us politically against risks that we cannot calculate, risks which might arise from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.'¹⁹

Various potential WMD proliferation developments could strengthen the case for upholding US extended deterrence commitments in NATO and beyond. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran might influence decisions in nearby countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, regarding potential national nuclear weapons development or acquisition programmes. Maintaining the credibility of US extended deterrence protection might be critical to assuring the beneficiaries of US security guarantees that they may safely forego pursuing their own national nuclear capabilities. A related policy challenge of pivotal importance is determining how the United States and its NATO allies might deter Iranian efforts to employ nuclear weapons.²⁰

Alternative to considering dependence on French and/or British nuclear forces

The hypothetical alternative of relying on French nuclear forces instead of US protection has been evoked repeatedly since France became a nuclear power in the 1960s; but the option has never been taken up by the non-nuclear-weapon-state allies. For example, in 1985 Manfred Wörner, then the West German Defence Minister, said, 'France's nuclear capability is insufficient to protect the Federal Republic [of Germany]. We will have to continue to rely on the American nuclear umbrella.'²¹

Some Germans have argued that the French should participate in NATO nuclear consultations rather than establishing a consultation arrangement (as the French have intermittently proposed since 1992) limited to Europeans, excluding the United States and implying that US nuclear commitments are unreliable. As Karl-Heinz Kamp observed in 1996, 'From a German viewpoint any European nuclear entity can only be one part of a European-transatlantic security structure.'²² In 2004 Peter Schmidt wrote, 'For Germany, a European solution could only be sound in the near future if it was associated with the [NATO] Alliance's nuclear policy.'²³ In 2007 it was reported that German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her foreign

¹⁹ Rühle cited in Evans, 'NATO says farewell to nuclear conflict'.

²⁰ For an incisive analysis, see Gregory F. Giles, 'Waging deterrence against Iran', in Karl-Heinz Kamp and David S. Yost, eds, *NATO and 21st century deterrence*, Forum Paper no. 8 (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2009), pp. 111–25, available at http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/publications/fp_08.pdf, accessed 25 May 2009.

²¹ Manfred Wörner interview in *International Defence Review* 18: 9, 1985, p. 1393.

²² Karl-Heinz Kamp, 'European nuclear cooperation: prospects and problems', presentation at NATO's 1996 NPG Symposium, 3 March 1996, p. 7.

²³ Peter Schmidt, 'La question nucléaire dans les relations franco-allemandes', *Défense Nationale*, Aug.–Sept. 2004, p. 82.

minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier had rejected French President Nicolas Sarkozy's offer to give Germany a say in French decision-making on nuclear weapons.²⁴

Expert observers from non-nuclear-weapon-state European allied nations have historically expressed several reservations regarding French proposals for a European Union dialogue on nuclear deterrence. First, the EU member states have not yet made alliance-like collective defence commitments to each other. Second, two EU members that are not NATO members (Ireland and Sweden) are among the countries that have long called in international forums for 'the reduction of reliance on nuclear weapons in security doctrines'. In their view, 'the possession of nuclear weapons' should give way to 'nuclear disarmament and ... a nuclear-weapon-free world.'²⁵ As a result, the willingness of Ireland and Sweden to be associated with an EU arrangement implying support for policies of nuclear deterrence is unclear. Third, some allies regard French (and British) nuclear capabilities as inadequate to provide a deterrent force to protect the EU and (aside from French and British national purposes) useful mainly as a supplement to the US extended deterrence arrangements with NATO members.²⁶ Fourth, making France the guarantor of the European Union's security would elevate France's political status to a level unacceptable to Germany, Italy, and other EU countries. Fifth, despite their repeated proposals, the French have in practice shown little willingness to accept nuclear consultation obligations and mechanisms. For example, concrete implementation arrangements for President François Mitterrand's 1986 promise to consult with the West German Chancellor before using nuclear weapons on German soil evidently never went very far.²⁷

Rather than welcoming an opportunity to grapple with the demanding political and strategic issues that would be raised in an attempt to pursue the hypothetical alternative of depending on French or Franco-British nuclear protection, the non-nuclear-weapon-state allies have preferred to rely on US extended deterrence arrangements in NATO, supplemented by the British nuclear commitment to NATO.

²⁴ Ble, 'Merkel lehnt Mitsprache ab', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 Sept. 2007. No official sources confirming the press reports on these French-German exchanges appear to be available.

²⁵ Statement by the New Agenda Coalition, delivered by South Africa, to the United Nations First Committee, 6 October 2008. The New Agenda Coalition, established in 1998, consists of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden.

²⁶ The allies agreed in the 1999 Strategic Concept that 'The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.' (North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, para. 62). This statement reiterated the judgement articulated in the 1991 Strategic Concept and the 1974 Ottawa declaration. The United Kingdom has committed its nuclear forces to NATO since 1962, subject to a supreme national interests clause, while French political leaders, including Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy, have repeatedly stated that the deterrence protection offered by France's nuclear forces is not limited to France alone.

²⁷ It should nonetheless be noted that there were discussions between NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and France's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces regarding nuclear employment issues during the Cold War. General Alexander Haig, then SACEUR, and General Guy Méry began these discussions in 1975 and their successors continued them. Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l'OTAN: De la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen* (Paris: Masson, 1991), pp. 121–2. France's suggestion in 1996 that it might be prepared to discuss nuclear deterrence matters in the North Atlantic Council does not appear to have led to any actual dialogue on nuclear questions involving France and its NATO allies. For further details and source references, see David S. Yost, 'France's new nuclear doctrine', *International Affairs* 82: 4, July 2006, pp. 708–9.

Alternative to the pursuit of national nuclear forces

The non-proliferation function of NATO's nuclear posture concerns not only the alliance's potential adversaries but also the members of the alliance that are non-nuclear-weapon states. The United States discovered in the mid-1960s that it was imperative to reach agreements with its NATO allies, particularly the Federal Republic of Germany, on nuclear sharing and consultation arrangements—including Germany's permanent membership in the NATO NPG founded in 1966–7—in order to be able to conclude the NPT.²⁸ The NATO arrangements, including US nuclear forces in Europe, have served to assure Germany and other non-nuclear-weapon-state allies that they have no need to seek nuclear weapons of their own.

These allies have, moreover, adhered to the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states. Duygu Bazoglu Sezer, a prominent Turkish scholar, nonetheless pointed out in 1995 that 'The Turkish commitment to non-nuclear weapons status is coupled with several strong qualifiers.' The caveats associated with US nuclear commitments are perhaps the most significant:

the strategic balance between the United States and NATO and the Russian Federation must not be allowed to erode, by the former's unilateral moves to the disadvantage of NATO, until Russia gives sustained evidence that it has devalued the role of nuclear weapons in its overall foreign policy, including its policy toward the near abroad and their neighbors rather than merely in its Western policy ... In other words, the extended deterrence of the United States must remain convincing and credible to Turks as well as to *de facto* and *de jure* nuclear weapons states and potential proliferators.²⁹

It is noteworthy in this regard that in 2007 US congressional staff sought the views of Turkish political leaders regarding how US extended deterrence commitments might affect their country's reaction to Tehran's possible acquisition of nuclear arms:

In a closed door meeting, staff asked a group of influential Turkish politicians how Turkey would respond to an Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons. These politicians emphatically responded that Turkey would pursue nuclear weapons as well. These individuals stated, 'Turkey would lose its importance in the region if Iran has nuclear weapons and Turkey does not.' Another politician said it would be 'compulsory' for Turkey to obtain nuclear weapons in such a scenario. However, when staff subsequently asked whether a U.S. nuclear umbrella and robust security commitment would be sufficient to dissuade Turkey from pursuing nuclear weapons, all three individuals agreed that it would.³⁰

²⁸ For a lucid account see Hal Brands, 'Non-proliferation and the dynamics of the middle Cold War: the superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT', *Cold War History* 7: 3, Aug. 2007, esp. pp. 404–9.

²⁹ Duygu Bazoglu Sezer, 'Turkey's new security environment, nuclear weapons and proliferation', *Comparative Strategy* 14: 2, April–June 1995, pp. 167–8.

³⁰ Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, *Chain Reaction: Avoiding a Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East*, Senate Print 110–34, 110th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, February 2008), p. 41. The author of the report, Bradley Bowman of Senator Richard Lugar's staff, conducted interviews between July and December 2007. The report is available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:39674.pdf, accessed 21 May 2009.

Evidence of the genuineness of US commitments

In NATO Europe (in contrast with, for example, Japan), it was generally agreed in leadership circles during the Cold War that a US nuclear weapons presence was one of the requirements for credible extended deterrence. As Alois Mertes, a Christian Democratic Union member of the Bundestag and CDU foreign policy spokesman, put it in 1981, when he argued for the deployment of land-based missiles instead of sea-based weapons, land-based nuclear forces ‘exercise a stronger deterrent impact, because they are clearly visible in a country whose protection the deterrent is intended to serve’. According to Mertes, the visibility—to Allied governments, if not to publics—of US nuclear forces in Europe ‘demonstrates the indivisibility of the territory covered by the Alliance and of Western security’. Mertes argued that relying on US nuclear forces at sea alone ‘could not adequately guarantee the linkage effect in favor of joint security for America and Europe’ and would eliminate the ‘visibility of American and European risk-sharing’.³¹

This judgement continues to be shared among many of the European politicians, officials and experts in NATO countries who take an active part in defence and security affairs. The primary rationales for US nuclear forces in Europe include contributing to the robustness of the transatlantic link and enhancing the credibility of US extended deterrence guarantees, in view of the judgement that US nuclear commitments would be substantially less credible if they depended solely on US forces at sea and in North America. US nuclear weapons on European soil, in other words, offer assurance to the allies regarding the seriousness and credibility of US security commitments. In the view of many European (and American) analysts, US nuclear weapons in Europe can be considered ‘coupling mechanisms’—that is, key means (among others) to connect US security commitments to US intercontinental nuclear forces and thus underscore a tangible ‘transatlantic link’ for protection in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

In other words, the traditional arguments for keeping US nuclear forces in Europe remain valid in the judgement of many officials and experts in the alliance. These arguments can be summed up as follows: US nuclear forces based in Europe send a more potent deterrent message about US commitments than reliance solely on US nuclear weapons at sea and in North America. With the US nuclear presence, extensive nuclear risk- and responsibility-sharing, and consultative arrangements for multinational nuclear policy deliberations and implementation, the alliance has greater confidence in its strength and cohesion than it would have without these interrelated attributes—and greater confidence that adversaries will recognize NATO’s resolve and capabilities.

Elements of assurance in US extended deterrence in NATO

The elements of assurance in US extended deterrence in NATO appear to include the following factors: confidence in the reliability of the United States;

³¹ Alois Mertes, ‘Abschreckung sichtbar machen’, *Die Zeit*, 19 June 1981, p. 7.

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the openness of the United States to allied influence; the US military presence in Europe; the US nuclear weapons presence in Europe as a link to US strategic nuclear forces; allied roles in the nuclear posture; and agreed strategic policy. Each of these elements merits consideration.

Confidence in the reliability of the United States

The confidence of the NATO allies in US reliability has historically been strong, despite significant differences over the Iraq conflict and the US 'war on terror'. Opinion polls have shown that, during the Cold War and subsequently, some West European allies have had more confidence in the reliability of the United States as an ally in collective defence contingencies than they have had in one another.

Most of the new members that have joined the alliance since the end of the Cold War, particularly those in Eastern and Central Europe, appear to have more confidence in the reliability of the United States than in the reliability of their West European counterparts. This is partly for historical reasons, including the 1938 Munich conference where Britain, France, Italy and Germany decided the future of Czechoslovakia. Many Czechs and Slovaks—and other East and Central Europeans—remember that Édouard Daladier, the French Prime Minister, was at Munich with Neville Chamberlain in September 1938. Although London and Paris honoured their commitment to declare war on Germany when Poland was invaded in 1939, this action seems less vivid than the Munich betrayal (and certain events during the war) in the historical memories of some East and Central Europeans. Moreover, some East and Central Europeans recall Western passivity and restraint in response to events such as the 1948 communist *coup de force* in Prague, the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Another historical factor is persistent resentment in some quarters in East and Central Europe derived from the judgement that the policies of détente pursued by West Germany and other West European states during the Cold War stabilized and prolonged Soviet rule. From the perspective of some Central and East European observers, West European states gave priority to their dialogue with the Soviet Union rather than to solidarity with East and Central European nations.

Some East and Central European observers have also perceived a recurrent tendency on the part of some of their West European allies to adopt a superior and condescending 'we know best' attitude. They cite as an example of this tendency French President Jacques Chirac's February 2003 statement that the nations that had signed the Vilnius Group declaration supporting US policy on Iraq were 'infantile' and 'poorly brought up', had 'missed a good chance to shut up', and had placed in danger their prospects of joining the European Union.³² By contrast, despite the reservations of some West European allies, the United States championed the post-Cold War NATO enlargement process. In parallel to NATO's Membership

³² The foreign ministers of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia published a statement concerning US policy on Iraq on 5 Feb. 2003. Chirac replied on 17 Feb. 2003.

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Action Plan, the United States provided substantial advice and assistance to East and Central European countries to prepare them for alliance membership.

Despite lingering historical grievances in some intra-alliance relationships, the conviction among the NATO allies as to their shared interests, values and purposes—a common ‘narrative’, as it is sometimes called—is the most fundamental factor in alliance cohesion and yet the most difficult to spell out. It encompasses the political foundations of the alliance, including the shared commitment to freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It implies that the United States is prepared to uphold the security of its NATO allies for fundamental political reasons in addition to military security considerations. In other words, the political foundations of the alliance contribute to trust in the reliability of the mutual defence pledges of the allies. This factor reinforces confidence in the extended deterrence commitment of the United States.

The openness of the United States to allied influence

A closely related element of assurance concerns Washington’s openness to allied influence regarding the use of force, the conduct of diplomacy, and deterrence policy. Owing to their dependence on the United States as a security guarantor, European NATO members have historically been concerned to avoid two risks: (a) that a direct conflict between the United States and another major power might draw the allies into war; and (b) that the United States might seek its own security to the neglect of that of its NATO allies in Europe. To manage (if not resolve) this policy challenge the NATO allies have spent decades developing formal and informal means of influencing US decision-making. NATO’s nuclear consultations arrangements have been of central importance in this respect, and the allies have succeeded in influencing US nuclear deterrence policy in NATO in various ways over the decades.³³

Some US decisions since the terrorist attacks against New York and Washington in September 2001 have damaged the reputation of the United States for prudence in the use of force. Opinion polls suggest that the organization of a coalition for the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 may have done the most harm, in conjunction with the subsequent discovery that Saddam Hussein in fact had not reconstituted Iraq’s WMD arsenal, including its chemical weapons. However, even the divisions within the alliance over the Iraq war did not lead any of the allies to call into question the foundations of the alliance or the arrangements for US extended deterrence, including US military and nuclear forces in Europe. Nor did any of the allies doubt that the United States would remain open to influence and compromise in the definition of NATO deterrence policy.

³³ For an authoritative discussion near the end of the Cold War with regard to ‘reassurance’ of the European allies and allied achievements in the nuclear consultations and decision-making process, including agreement in 1986 on the General Political Guidelines for deterrence and crisis management, see the Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture by Manfred Wörner, then the NATO Secretary General, on 23 November 1988, available at http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1988/s881123a_e.htm, accessed 1 June 2009.

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Indeed, some NATO allies regarded the Iraq war as an opportunity to demonstrate their reliability to Washington and thereby enhance US appreciation of their standing as security partners. A high-ranking Polish official gave this reason for Poland's involvement in Iraq:

And so, when a US concept arose in 2002–2003 of cooperating with Poland, among other countries, within the framework of the war on terrorism (including the war in Iraq), Polish diplomacy responded affirmatively, perceiving this as an opportunity to bind the United States directly with Poland's security in our region and to obtain assistance in modernizing the Polish Armed Forces.³⁴

Juri Luik, the Estonian ambassador to the United States, offered a similar argument for his country's engagement in Iraq:

Just like in personal friendships, we value more highly the friends who come to help us in difficult times, so have the nations who have supported the USA after the 11 September catastrophe found a significant place in US political memory ... Estonian soldiers who fight in Iraq risking their lives ensure US interest in NATO and secure NATO deterrence capability.³⁵

NATO's new members in Eastern and Central Europe are also well represented in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and other operational units in Afghanistan. One of their motives may be to demonstrate their reliability to the United States, and thus reinforce Washington's sense of moral and political obligation to honour its security commitments in Europe.

The US military presence in Europe

The US military presence in Europe has historically been viewed as an essential proof of Washington's commitment to the security of the NATO allies, signifying the certainty of direct US involvement in meeting any aggression against the alliance. This deterrence role remains pertinent, although the United States has substantially reduced its conventional military force levels in Europe since the early 1990s.

It is noteworthy in this regard that new allies in Eastern and Central Europe have expressed a willingness to host US and NATO facilities. One of the main reasons given by Czech and Polish supporters of the deployment of US missile defence system elements has been to gain the presence of US troops on their soil. Whatever happens with the missile defence plans under the new US administration, these countries remain interested in hosting US or NATO facilities. Radek Sikorski, the Polish foreign minister, declared in November 2008 that, although Poland joined the alliance in 1999, it had so far received only a promise of a NATO conference

³⁴ Witold Waszczykowski, Deputy Chief of the National Security Office, 'Shield over Poland?', *Warsaw Observer* (in Polish), Dec. 2008, pp. 20–33, EUP20081216021001.

³⁵ 'Estonian and US common deterrence policy', *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2 April 2004, in BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, 5 April 2004.

centre. 'Everyone agrees', he added, 'that countries that have US soldiers on their territory do not get invaded.'³⁶

Hungary's willingness to host NATO's new strategic airlift capability initiative is significant in this respect. The base at Papa will host three C-17 aircraft and over 150 personnel, with the majority scheduled to arrive from the United States in the spring and summer of 2009. The commander of the heavy airlift wing will be a US Air Force officer. Hungary will make a disproportionate contribution to the staffing of the base facilities. It is reasonable to presume that the Hungarian government sees a deterrence benefit in hosting a NATO installation with substantial US military participation.

The US nuclear weapons presence in Europe as a link to US strategic nuclear forces

The remaining US nuclear weapons in Europe—reduced by more than 97 per cent from the high level reached during the Cold War—have been regarded as sufficient for assurance and extended deterrence owing in part to the continuing link to US strategic nuclear forces.³⁷ According to the 1999 Strategic Concept, one of the important functions of the US nuclear weapons presence in Europe is to provide linkage to the strategic forces that constitute the ultimate deterrent to aggression or coercion. Ever since the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957 and developed the world's first ICBMs, the alliance has been subject to periodic crises of confidence—in essence, European doubts about America's will to defend its allies, given the risk of prompt intercontinental nuclear retaliation from Russia. These doubts have been aggravated whenever Americans have expressed anxieties about US strategic capabilities—as during the 'bomber gap' and 'missile gap' controversies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the debates about ICBM vulnerability in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Given this historical pattern, if a new debate emerged in the United States about the adequacy of the US nuclear force posture for national security, allied experts and officials would probably ask questions about the implications for NATO—and for Japan and other beneficiaries of US nuclear guarantees. The recent Perry–Schlesinger report suggests that such a debate may be on the horizon.³⁸ A polarizing internal US debate (perhaps stimulated by the forthcoming Nuclear Posture Review) could lead to public questions about the reliability of US nuclear

³⁶ Sikorski quoted in Walter Pincus, 'Poland won't lobby Obama on missile defense', *Washington Post*, 20 Nov. 2008. Sikorski did not mention that the headquarters of NATO's Multinational Corps Northeast has been based in Szczecin, Poland, since 1999. Moreover, since 2004 NATO's Joint Force Training Centre, a subordinate agency of Allied Command Transformation, has been based at Bydgoszcz, Poland.

³⁷ 'Deployed weapons in Europe have been reduced by more than 97 per cent since their peak in the 1970s.' *Report of the Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management, Phase 11: review of the DoD nuclear mission* (Arlington, VA: Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management, Dec. 2008), p. 59.

³⁸ The Perry–Schlesinger report is formally entitled *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, William J. Perry, Chairman, and James R. Schlesinger, Vice-Chairman (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009). See in particular ch. 5, 'On the nuclear weapons stockpile', and ch. 6, 'On the nuclear weapons complex'. The report is available at http://www.usip.org/strategic_posture/final.html, accessed 25 May 2009.

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forces, and this could undermine allied confidence in US extended deterrence. By contrast, US consensus on investment in sustaining and modernizing the nation's nuclear weapons and infrastructure could support allied perceptions of the continued reliability of the US nuclear posture. Indeed, the continued viability of what some Americans call the US nuclear 'enterprise' may be more reassuring to US allies than the overall size and specific characteristics of the nuclear force. For US allies in Europe and elsewhere, short of a grave crisis that would test the resolve and operational capabilities of the United States, the overall health of the US nuclear enterprise and the US nuclear force posture remains significant for extended deterrence.

Allied roles in the nuclear posture

Allied roles in the nuclear posture changed substantially with the removal of US ground-based systems from Europe in 1991–2. The remaining air-delivered nuclear capability nonetheless maintains a high degree of involvement for the allies participating directly in the alliance's nuclear deterrent. Allied roles include hosting US nuclear weapons and dual-capable aircraft at select US airbases in Europe as well as hosting US nuclear weapons at select allied airbases where dual-capable allied aircraft are maintained and operated. Some non-nuclear-weapon-state allies without host or delivery roles can participate in the implementation of the alliance's nuclear policy through non-nuclear air support activities. Such activities help to compensate for the fact that the number of allies with nuclear host and/or delivery responsibilities is a shrinking proportion of the total, owing to NATO enlargement.

Participating directly in NATO's nuclear posture provides select NATO allies with a cadre of nuclear experts and key officials with experience in thinking about nuclear deterrence and the requirements of nuclear crisis management operations. The national representatives in the NPG Staff Group at NATO headquarters in Brussels and the experts in nuclear policy issues in the defence ministries of NATO governments are often active-duty or retired military officers with experience in nuclear planning and operations. The allied roles in NATO's nuclear posture reflect a high degree of mutual trust and confidence. These roles promote alliance cohesion, add to assurance about the genuineness of US commitments, and make consultations more informed and meaningful.

Some European observers point out that the various allied roles in the nuclear posture show that assurance is a 'two-way street'. By shouldering nuclear risks and responsibilities, despite some domestic political opposition, the allies demonstrate to the United States their commitment to the transatlantic link and the NATO nuclear posture and thereby gain influence in allied decision-making with respect to nuclear issues.³⁹ Partly for this reason, some European experts have expressed serious doubts about the advisability of relying on US nuclear systems at sea or

³⁹ The allies participating in the alliance's nuclear posture with nationally provided dual-capable aircraft are known in NATO parlance as the DCA states.

in North America as a substitute for US nuclear forces in Europe. Among other advantages, the presence in Europe of US nuclear weapons enables allies to contribute directly to the nuclear deterrent posture and to demonstrate NATO's capability to undertake crisis management on a collective basis.

Consultations make clear that the allies are not simply contributing to one country's national strategy, but participating in a collective decision-making process. All the allies except France participate in the NPG.⁴⁰ Consultations contribute to assurance because allies play an active role in the formation of NATO nuclear deterrence policy and participate in the exchange of sensitive information.

Agreed strategic policy

Throughout the history of the alliance, US nuclear weapons have been seen as supremely important political instruments, and their fundamental purpose has been deterrence and war prevention. Since the late 1960s the key concepts have been crisis management and prompt 'restoration of deterrence' to stop aggression and end a war.

As corollary principles, NATO governments have consistently agreed that Europe must not be made safe for prolonged or large-scale conventional war, and that potential aggressors must be convinced that NATO retains all options – that is, that the alliance has not ruled out retaliating against aggression with nuclear weapons through the adoption of a no-first-use pledge. The 'Allies concerned' (all except France) nonetheless indicated in the 1991 Strategic Concept that 'the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated by them are ... even more remote'.⁴¹ They recast a similar sentence in the 1999 Strategic Concept to assure public opinion that such circumstances had become 'extremely remote' and, as noted previously, that 'NATO's nuclear forces no longer target any country'.⁴²

Assurance and the origins of the current posture

The public evidence on the origins of the current US and NATO nuclear posture in Europe—the 1991 US Presidential Nuclear Initiatives—throws some light on the factors that the NATO allies have regarded as essential for assurance. In his

⁴⁰ Iceland has reportedly chosen not to participate in some NPG discussions, or has decided simply to send an observer. France has never participated in NPG deliberations. The NPG was established soon after France's withdrawal from the alliance's integrated military structure in 1966. In 2007–2009 France conducted a review of its national, NATO and European Union policies on security and defence, and decided to return to full participation in the alliance's integrated military structure. However, according to the June 2008 white paper, participation in the NPG 'poses a problem of a different nature owing to the complete independence of our nuclear means'. (*Défense et sécurité nationale: le livre blanc*: Paris: Odile Jacob/La Documentation Française, June 2008, p. 110.) In April 2009, President Sarkozy announced that France will not participate in the 'nuclear' part of the alliance. (Interview on Europe 1, 1 April 2009.) This has been construed to encompass the NPG and associated nuclear consultation forums. While a change in French policy in this regard appears improbable, it cannot be completely excluded.

⁴¹ North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 7 Nov. 1991, para. 56.

⁴² North Atlantic Council, Strategic Concept, 24 April 1999, para. 64. As in the 1991 Strategic Concept, France was excluded by the 'Allies concerned' formula.

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September 1991 speech announcing the initiatives, President George H. W. Bush said: 'We will, of course, ensure that we preserve an effective air-delivered nuclear capability in Europe. That is essential to NATO's security.'⁴³ The evolving views within the alliance about nuclear deterrence requirements appear to have influenced the thinking of US officials. In April 1989, May 1990 and May 1991 the NPG endorsed a shift in emphasis towards longer-range and more flexible air-delivered capabilities.⁴⁴ In October 1991, about three weeks after the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, the NPG confirmed that the initiatives would mean the elimination of all ground-launched systems and the radical reduction of air-deliverable weapons for the US and alliance nuclear posture in Europe.⁴⁵ Rob de Wijk, an official in the Netherlands Defence Ministry during the period in question, has offered the following account of thinking in the alliance concerning nuclear options at that time:

Now that the threat had become more diffuse, more flexibility with regard to nuclear options was needed in order to deter potential aggressors. This meant that the number of nuclear options considered necessary, combined with factors such as the vulnerability of nuclear systems and the political necessity of participation in the key tasks by as many of the allies as possible, would determine the size of the arsenal.⁴⁶

The published evidence suggests that air-delivered weapons were retained, albeit in significantly reduced numbers, because the allies, including the United States, saw them as most consistent with the NPG criteria of 'longer ranges', 'greater flexibility' and 'widespread Alliance participation'. In other words, the air-delivered weapons could provide assurance as well as deterrence. Specific numerical levels have been less important than preserving a force posture that supports the principles articulated in the 1991 and 1999 Strategic Concepts—that is, European basing to support the transatlantic link, widespread participation, survivability and flexibility—in conjunction with the other elements of assurance, including consultations.

A distinctive aspect of the current nuclear-sharing arrangements is that certain political leaders in allied nations in western Europe with long standing host and delivery responsibilities appear to place less emphasis on the imperative of maintaining NATO's established nuclear deterrence posture, including US nuclear weapons in Europe, than political leaders in some of the new allied nations in East and Central Europe. The new allies are, however, politically barred from hosting allied nuclear weapons by the 'three no's' commitment of the alliance, first articulated in 1996, and repeated in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act: 'The member States of NATO reiterate that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, nor any need to change

⁴³ George H. W. Bush, 'Address to the nation on reducing United States and Soviet nuclear weapons', 27 Sept. 1991, in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 27: 39, 30 Sept. 1991, pp. 1349–50.

⁴⁴ NATO NPG, final communiqué, 19–20 April 1989, para. 6; NATO NPG, final communiqué, 9–10 May 1990, paras 5 and 6; Defense Planning Committee and NATO NPG, final communiqué, 28–9 May 1991, para. 13.

⁴⁵ NATO NPG, final communiqué, 17–18 Oct. 1991, paras 5 and 6.

⁴⁶ Rob de Wijk, *NATO on the brink of the new millennium: the battle for consensus* (London and Washington DC: Brassey's, 1997), p. 40.

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any aspect of NATO's nuclear posture or nuclear policy—and do not foresee any future need to do so.⁴⁷

Contrasting approaches to assurance and extended deterrence

It has never been easy to assure allies of the reliability and credibility of extended deterrence commitments. As two Lithuanian experts recently observed,

security guarantees from third nations always suffer from credibility problems. History provides many examples when extended deterrence fails (e.g. British and French security guarantees did not deter Germany from attacking Poland in 1939). Extended *nuclear* deterrence is even more difficult to implement. For the United States, the United Kingdom or France to prove to other nations that they are ready to risk nuclear holocaust for the sake of the Baltic states is extremely difficult.⁴⁸

Since the end of the Cold War there have been discussions behind the scenes both among the allies and within allied governments about the continuing purposes of US nuclear weapons in Europe, and the optimal way to fulfil these purposes.

As has often been the case, the discussion within the United States has been more visible than that within most other allied nations. The US deliberations have featured those taking a 'target coverage perspective' versus those favouring a 'political and strategic functions perspective'. Those taking the 'target coverage perspective' point out that the United States could use delivery means other than dual-capable aircraft deployed in Europe—such as sea-launched ballistic or cruise missiles, ICBMs or strategic bombers—to strike targets with nuclear weapons, and argue that some of these alternative strike assets would offer comparable or greater operational reliability and present fewer political complications. Moreover, proponents of this perspective argue, the current dual-capable aircraft arrangements in Europe incur 'opportunity costs', in that maintaining and modernizing nuclear-certified aircraft, weapons storage sites, and associated facilities involve continuing expenses. Finally, adherents of this perspective hold that maintaining weapons at multiple facilities raises safety and security issues that would not arise if the weapons were centrally stored in the United States.

Supporters of the 'political and strategic functions perspective' note that the US nuclear weapons in Europe, and the US and allied dual-capable aircraft, provide assurance to the NATO allies as to the existential nature of the US commitment. The weapons and aircraft make it possible for the United States and its NATO allies to constitute and maintain an alliance deterrent. Through these arrangements the allies demonstrate their solidarity and share risks and responsibilities, and they maintain capabilities for forward basing and political signalling (including a message of alliance cohesion) that might well be useful in crisis management. From this perspective, the United States and its NATO allies can maintain assurance and US extended deterrence far more effectively by sustaining the longstanding

⁴⁷ Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, Paris, 27 May 1997, available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/fndact-a.htm>, accessed 20 May 2009.

⁴⁸ Vaidotas Urbelis and Kestutis Paulauskas, 'NATO's deterrence policy: time for change?', *Baltic Security and Defence Review* 10, 2008, p. 99 (emphasis in original).

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arrangements than by experimenting with an entirely US-based and operated nuclear deterrent posture. Proponents of the 'political and strategic functions perspective' maintain that safety and security concerns are groundless, in view of the measures taken over the past decades to meet US and NATO security standards; and they note that the number of storage sites is much smaller than it was during the Cold War.

In December 2008 the Secretary of Defense Task Force on nuclear weapons management in the Department of Defense publicly discussed the division between these two perspectives with exceptional clarity, and criticized the 'target coverage' approach adopted by some high-ranking US military officers, notably at the US European Command (USEUCOM):

The Task Force found at NATO Headquarters in Brussels some concern among NATO allies about the credibility of the US extended nuclear deterrent. The allies believe in the US nuclear deterrent as a pillar of the alliance. Some allies have been troubled to learn that during the last decade some senior US military leaders have advocated for the unilateral removal of US nuclear weapons from Europe ... Much of the deterrent value of NATO's DCA [dual-capable aircraft] deployment is derived from their in-theater presence, demonstrating and maintaining the capability to employ them ... USEUCOM argues that an 'over the horizon' strategic capability is just as credible. It believes there is no military downside to the unilateral withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe. This attitude fails to comprehend—and therefore undermines—the political value our friends and allies place on these weapons, the political costs of withdrawal, and the psychological impact of their visible presence as well as the security linkages they provide ... DCA fighters and nuclear weapons are visible, capable, recallable, reusable, and flexible and are a military statement of NATO and US political will. These NATO forces provide a number of advantages to the alliance that go far beyond USEUCOM's narrow perception of their military utility.⁴⁹

US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in October 2008, with regard to the US extended nuclear deterrence posture in NATO, including the roles of allies, 'my impression is that all of our allies in Europe are very comfortable with the arrangements that we have today'.⁵⁰

The debate in Germany on the future of assurance and extended deterrence has focused on areas distinct from those accorded highest priority in the United States, with substantial concentration on promoting nuclear disarmament and sustaining influence on US and alliance policy. All governments of the Federal Republic of Germany have supported NATO's nuclear deterrent posture since 1955, when the country joined NATO. The alliance's deterrent posture has long included the presence of US nuclear weapons on German soil, as well as German participation in risk- and responsibility-sharing through dual-capable aircraft. Even the 'red-green' government headed by Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Gerhard

⁴⁹ James R. Schlesinger, chairman, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management, Phase II: review of the DoD nuclear mission* (Arlington, VA: Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management, Dec. 2008), pp. 14–15, 59–60. This report is available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/PhaseIIReportFinal.pdf>, accessed 20 May 2009.

⁵⁰ Robert M. Gates, 'Nuclear weapons and deterrence in the 21st century', speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, 28 Oct. 2008, p. 15 of transcript available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/1028_transcrip_gates_checked.pdf, accessed 20 May 2009.

Schröder, who served as Chancellor in 1998–2005, with the Green leader Joschka Fischer as foreign minister, supported this posture.⁵¹

Since November 2005 Germany's coalition government has been headed by Angela Merkel, the CDU/CSU leader serving as Chancellor, with Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the SPD as foreign minister. While the CDU/CSU–SPD government has continued Germany's longstanding policy regarding participation in the alliance's nuclear deterrence posture, notably in the 2006 defence white paper, only CDU/CSU members of the Bundestag have been willing to uphold the policy publicly in recent statements.

For example, in the June 2008 debate in the Bundestag on NATO's nuclear posture the CDU/CSU speakers held that the storage sites for US nuclear weapons in Europe are secure, and argued that the removal of the US nuclear weapons deployed in Germany would weaken the transatlantic link, diminish Germany's influence in NATO decision-making, place nuclear-sharing and NATO strategy into question, and undermine the security of Germany and the alliance as a whole. Politicians from other parties—including the CDU/CSU's coalition partner, the SPD—called for the removal of US nuclear weapons from Germany and Europe.⁵² The arguments employed by the speakers calling for the removal of US nuclear weapons included the contention that removing the weapons would promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and the fact that NATO NPG consultations are open to all allies that choose to participate, including those without nuclear host and delivery responsibilities.⁵³ The Bundestag debate of April 2009 on nuclear disarmament issues was conditioned to a large extent by election year dynamics, but the CDU/CSU members maintained their essential positions on NATO nuclear deterrence policy.⁵⁴ Indeed, in the end the government coalition (CDU/CSU–SPD) sustained the policy defined in the 2006 defence white paper, owing to the requirements of coalition discipline.

In April 2009 Steinmeier added his voice to those calling for the removal of US nuclear weapons from Germany.⁵⁵ Steinmeier argued that the weapons are 'militarily obsolete' and that their removal would be a contribution to nuclear disarmament.⁵⁶ In contrast, the Chancellor appears to judge that Germany would have less influence in the alliance's nuclear decision-making if it were no longer bearing the risks and responsibilities of a nation contributing delivery aircraft, personnel and bases. The impression that weight in decision-making is a function of the magnitude of the contribution applies throughout the alliance—in conventional

⁵¹ In 1998, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer proposed that the alliance consider adopting a no-first-use policy, but this proposal failed to gain much support in the alliance.

⁵² The parties other than the SPD include the Free Democrats (FDP), the Alliance 90/Greens, and Die Linke (The Left), the latter formed in 2007 by a merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism and other leftist movements.

⁵³ Deutscher Bundestag, *Stenografischer Bericht*, Plenarprotokoll 16/171, 25 June 2008, pp. 18124–38.

⁵⁴ Deutscher Bundestag, *Stenografischer Bericht*, Plenarprotokoll 16/218, 24 April 2009, pp. 23753–23766.

⁵⁵ Four prominent former officials recently called for the withdrawal from Germany of the remaining US nuclear weapons: Helmut Schmidt, Richard von Weizsäcker, Egon Bahr and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, 'Toward a nuclear-free world: a German view', *International Herald Tribune*, 9 Jan. 2009.

⁵⁶ Steinmeier quoted in Spiegel Online International, 10 April 2009, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,61850,00.html>, accessed 20 May 2009.

capabilities and operations as well as nuclear ones. It is noteworthy that in March 2009 Merkel said:

NATO has already reduced its nuclear potential by around 95 per cent compared to the year 1989 and reduced the readiness of nuclear weapons. At the same time, however, we have observed that the number of nuclear actors and nuclear arsenals has increased, as have the risks of nuclear proliferation globally. Therefore, this is one of the major security risks which we must confront in a decided and determined manner. This is one of the tasks whose management is in Germany's fundamental interests. For this reason the federal government fixed alliance nuclear burden sharing as one of the anchors of the White Paper, because we know that this assures us influence in the alliance, even in this extremely sensitive area.⁵⁷

Merkel and Steinmeier made their statements in a political context shaped by anticipation of the Bundestag elections scheduled for September 2009.⁵⁸ Discussions relating to national responsibilities in NATO nuclear deterrence policy have been more public in Germany than in other European NATO DCA states.

Conclusion: challenges in pursuit of alliance consensus

In their Declaration on Alliance Security at the April 2009 Strasbourg/Kehl summit, the NATO allies noted that 'Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and collective defence, based on the indivisibility of Allied security, are, and will remain, the cornerstone of our Alliance. Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy.'⁵⁹

In the tradition of many alliance policy statements, this declaration avoided divisive specifics. All allies could endorse a vague call for 'an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities'. This formula said nothing about how allies would bear nuclear risks and responsibilities or how they would configure capabilities to ensure 'the indivisibility of Allied security' for collective defence and deterrence.

⁵⁷ 'Regierungserklärung von Angela Merkel zum Nato-Gipfel', 26 March 2009, available at http://www.bundesregierung.de/nn_1264/Content/DE/Regierungserklaerung/2009/03/2009-03-26-regerkl-merkel-nato.html, accessed 20 May 2009. The Chancellor's reference to a reduction of 'around 95 per cent compared to the year 1989' seems to be in the same general range as the figure of 'more than 97 per cent since ... the 1970s' in the Secretary of Defense Task Force report cited above. It is, however, difficult to compare published sources on percentage reductions in the US nuclear weapons presence in Europe because the figures provided are based on different temporal baselines. The calculation in the Chancellor's statement may include the implementation of the US-Soviet INF Treaty, which entered into force in June 1988, as well as the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives. According to the NATO website, 'The nuclear weapons assigned to NATO have been reduced by over 90 per cent since the end of the Cold War'. ('Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation in NATO', available at http://www.nato.int/issues/arms_disarm_nonprol/index.html, accessed 20 May 2009.) The timing of 'the end of the Cold War' is not specified in the NATO statement.

⁵⁸ Merkel will be the candidate for Chancellor of the CDU/CSU, and Steinmeier the candidate of the SPD. In February 2009, in an article co-authored with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Merkel affirmed the continuing importance of nuclear deterrence, despite the unpopularity of this theme in German public opinion. (See Merkel and Sarkozy, 'La sécurité, notre mission commune', *Le Monde*, 3 February 2009; and 'Wir Europäer müssen mit einer Stimme sprechen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 February 2009.) German observers have noted that Merkel took this position at the start of an election year and at a time when Steinmeier chose to focus on arms control and disarmament. She has maintained this position in subsequent months.

⁵⁹ Declaration on Alliance Security, issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl, 4 April 2009.

As in the past, the allies will probably seek compromises to deal with sensitive and complex topics, including the future of NATO's nuclear posture and the US extended deterrence commitment. Three factors may make reaching consensus on this subject during the Strategic Concept review particularly challenging: the arms control context; divisions in both public and expert opinion in NATO nations; and concerns about the possible consequences of a rupture with established arrangements for the sharing of nuclear risks and responsibilities.

Arms control

With the upcoming NPT review conference in 2010, the NATO allies will face the challenge of satisfying competing imperatives: showing political commitment to nuclear disarmament and maintaining nuclear deterrence capabilities. The allies will wish to reconcile their interest in pursuing visible and substantive measures in the domain of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament with their determination to maintain and adapt the alliance's arrangements for extended deterrence.⁶⁰ At the April 2008 Bucharest summit the allies agreed on the following statement: 'We reaffirm that arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation will continue to make an important contribution to peace, security, and stability and, in this regard, to preventing the spread and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their means of delivery. We took note of the report prepared for us on raising NATO's profile in this field.'⁶¹ The NATO allies made a similar statement at the April 2009 Strasbourg/Kehl summit, and noted: 'The Allies continue to seek to enhance security and stability at the lowest possible level of forces consistent with the alliance's ability to provide for collective defence and to fulfil the full range of its missions.'⁶² Moreover, in the April 2009 Declaration on Alliance Security, the allies stated, 'NATO will continue to play its part in reinforcing arms control and promoting nuclear and conventional disarmament in accordance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as non-proliferation efforts'.⁶³

The report 'on raising NATO's profile' in the field of 'arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation' is known within the alliance as the German–Norwegian initiative.⁶⁴ The references to the objective of 'raising NATO's profile' in both the April 2008 and April 2009 summit declarations demonstrate that it has gained acceptance throughout the alliance, despite the initial reservations of some allies and the fact that NATO, per se, is not a party to any arms control treaty. The allies

⁶⁰ While the alliance's nuclear-sharing arrangements involving US nuclear weapons in Europe have attracted some criticism in NPT discussions, this issue seems less crucial to allied observers than reconciling extended deterrence with arms control and disarmament priorities.

⁶¹ Bucharest summit declaration, issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008, para. 39.

⁶² Strasbourg/Kehl summit declaration, issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl on 4 April 2009, para. 55.

⁶³ Declaration on Alliance Security, 4 April 2009.

⁶⁴ The German and Norwegian Foreign Ministers—Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Jonas Gahr Støre—launched this initiative in May 2007.

Assurance and US extended deterrence in NATO

highlighted the 'public awareness' aspect of the question in the Strasbourg/Kehl summit declaration: 'NATO and Allies should continue contributing to international efforts in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. We aim at achieving a higher level of public awareness of NATO's contribution in these fields.'⁶⁵

Whether the allies and like-minded international security partners will be able to achieve significant results in nuclear non-proliferation is unclear. The risk of the emergence of new nuclear weapons powers (such as Iran and North Korea), despite the arms control and non-proliferation efforts of the NATO allies and their partners in international security, constitutes an argument for adapting policy rationales to changing circumstances and maintaining the alliance's deterrence posture, including US nuclear weapons in Europe, up to date and in good order. This argument for a reliable deterrence posture does not exclude further reductions in US and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals. Moreover, many NATO European expert observers hold, this argument would not exclude additional reductions in US nuclear weapons in Europe, but they would foresee such reductions rather late in the overall nuclear arms control process. However, some European observers argue for the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe as a contribution to nuclear disarmament. Others favour using US nuclear weapons as a 'bargaining chip' in possible US–Russian negotiations with a view to reducing or eliminating Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons and/or gaining greater transparency about Moscow's arsenal. Substantial differences persist in NATO Europe regarding how the alliance's nuclear deterrence posture could and should be affected by arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament measures.

Divisions in public and expert opinion

The Strasbourg/Kehl summit objective of 'achieving a higher level of public awareness of NATO's contribution' in the field of 'arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation' underscores the interest of the allies in satisfying the public's yearning for progress in this domain. This is not, however, the sole imperative in the alliance's policy-making concerning assurance and extended deterrence. As the US and German examples show, policy-makers and experts within specific countries are divided as to the requirements of extended deterrence.

Moreover, there is no threat perception justifying nuclear deterrence in some quarters in NATO Europe. Broadly speaking, at the mass public level in some countries of Western Europe, Russia seems no longer to be regarded as a threat justifying the retention of the alliance's nuclear deterrence arrangements. In contrast, public opinion in Eastern and Central Europe remains concerned about a potential threat from Russia. As Maria Mälksoo, an Estonian analyst, recently wrote, 'NATO's general, system-wide deterrence effect could be sustained by the continuing presence of the United States' nuclear forces in Europe'.⁶⁶ The

⁶⁵ Strasbourg/Kehl summit declaration, para. 55.

⁶⁶ Maria Mälksoo, *NATO's new strategic concept: what is at stake for Estonia?* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence Studies, Nov. 2008), p. 6.

alliance's nuclear deterrence posture is more widely viewed as advantageous for maintaining peace and stability in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in Turkey, than in certain other parts of NATO Europe. Bruno Tertrais has observed that 'a US nuclear withdrawal could be *perceived* as a lessening of transatlantic security ties by countries which are particularly keen to shelter behind US protection, such as Poland, the Baltic States and Turkey'.⁶⁷ Threat perceptions in the alliance diverge and are subject to flux, but the two countries most often listed in recent years by NATO experts as widely agreed justifications for maintaining the alliance's nuclear deterrence posture have been Russia and Iran.⁶⁸

Many allied experts and officials continue to hold that the US nuclear deterrence commitment—made manifest by US nuclear weapons in Europe—constitutes the collective defence core of the alliance.⁶⁹ From their perspective, the US nuclear weapons presence in Europe bolsters the credibility of extended deterrence, provides assurance to allies as to the genuineness of US commitments, and makes for fairer sharing of risks and responsibilities. In their view, the relevance of the US weapons in Europe in crisis management contingencies cannot be excluded, and it is prudent to retain the options inherent in this capability. Many European experts and officials also consider this posture essential for war prevention and political stability in the alliance's relations with Russia. They therefore wish to preserve as much continuity as possible in the alliance's nuclear deterrence posture in Europe. However, the European allies, including the new allies in Eastern and Central Europe, would generally prefer to avoid a public debate on NATO's nuclear deterrence posture. There is a general reluctance to bring divisions to the surface in such a sensitive domain.

Possible consequences of a rupture with established arrangements

Given the views of policy-makers and experts in NATO countries, notably in Turkey and in some of the new allies in East and Central Europe, some observers are concerned that it could be deeply damaging to US credibility, disruptive of alliance cohesion and potentially destabilizing to European security to withdraw the remaining US nuclear weapons in Europe. Withdrawing the weapons could be perceived as a signal of US disengagement and as evidence of a diminished US commitment to the security of NATO Europe.

Such a withdrawal would be inconsistent with the objective of assuring US allies, and not only in Europe. There are connections between the US deterrence

⁶⁷ Bruno Tertrais, *The coming NATO nuclear debate*, ARI 117/2008 (Madrid: Fundacion Real Instituto Elcano, 26 Sept. 2008), p. 4 (emphasis in original); available at http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/riecano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/Elcano_in/Zonas_in/Defense+Security/ARI117-2008, accessed 20 May 2009.

⁶⁸ In addition to Bruno Tertrais's essay, see Oliver Thränert, 'US nuclear forces in Europe to zero? Yes, but not yet', *Proliferation Analysis*, 10 Dec. 2008, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22533&prog=zgp&proj=znpp>, accessed 20 May 2009.

⁶⁹ The alliance's collective defence is nonetheless based on various factors in addition to the US extended nuclear deterrent, including conventional military capabilities and the mutual defence commitment expressed in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

posture in Europe and US security partners and interests elsewhere. Australian and Japanese officials and experts are, for example, monitoring US decisions about extended deterrence globally; and they see US decisions about NATO's nuclear posture and policy as emblematic of the US extended deterrence commitment to their own security. A loss of confidence in the reliability of the protection provided by US extended deterrence could lead some US allies and security partners to consider seeking their own national nuclear forces or to invest more in potential hedging measures such as air and missile defences and/or enrichment and reprocessing capabilities.

The United States has been engaged in nuclear force cooperation with its allies in Europe since the 1950s, and this half-century of history has a certain political weight. If the United States unilaterally withdrew its remaining nuclear forces, the European allies would recognize that something fundamental had changed in their relationship with Washington. If the withdrawal was undertaken at the behest of the Europeans, US political leaders could for their part come to question the commitment of the European allies to bear their share of the risks and responsibilities associated with the alliance's nuclear deterrence posture. Withdrawal of the remaining US weapons could lead to an erosion of confidence on both sides. Some allied observers are concerned that depending on offshore and distant US central strategic systems to protect the European allies would not have the same political significance as continued allied involvement in risk- and responsibility-sharing.

NATO's nuclear burden-sharing arrangements help to maintain a common security culture within the alliance and to prevent a division between the allies that possess nuclear arms and those that do not. The involvement of non-nuclear-weapon states in nuclear-sharing arrangements creates a quality of engagement and solidarity distinct from that which would be feasible without that involvement. The political dynamics of the alliance might well change without US nuclear weapons in Europe—and not for the better, in the view of some allied observers. Over time the non-nuclear-weapon-state allies would almost certainly have less expertise regarding nuclear issues and less influence over (and less insight into) US policy-making.⁷⁰ Some allied observers fear that with no US nuclear weapons in Europe, the United States might be less likely to engage in consultations with allies in defining doctrine and in making operational decisions.

In short, some allied observers are concerned that giving up the shared nuclear response capability could weaken the bonds that tie the NATO allies together as a security community. Because the US extended deterrent provides NATO with a capability that is jointly owned and operated, there is a high level of cohesion based on shared risks and responsibilities, particularly among the NATO DCA

⁷⁰ Some analysts have suggested that the assignment of allied officers to US commands, such as the US Strategic Command in Nebraska, might compensate to some extent for the termination of long-standing risk- and responsibility-sharing arrangements based on US nuclear weapons in Europe. Such personnel assignments would, however, clearly fall short of the quality of engagement and experience furnished by allies maintaining national delivery systems and operational responsibilities. Moreover, whether the US authorities would welcome assignments of personnel from allied nations unwilling to accept host and/or delivery responsibilities is unclear and untested.

states. Moreover, some allied observers maintain, some current non-nuclear-weapon-state NATO allies cannot be protected from aggression or coercion without nuclear deterrence capabilities. If the allies gave up the current nuclear-sharing arrangements and relied solely on the strategic nuclear forces of France, the United Kingdom and the United States, the alliance's nuclear deterrent posture could be seen as less credible by the non-nuclear-weapon-state allies, if not by potential adversaries. A security gap dividing the nuclear-weapon-state allies from non-nuclear-weapon-state allies could emerge in the perceptions of the latter group of countries. Indeed, if the British and French forces were reduced further, the political gap between the United States and most of its NATO allies in nuclear risk- and responsibility-sharing could be widened.

Moreover, the withdrawal of the US nuclear weapons remaining in Europe could be seen as a break with the historic transatlantic bargain whereby the United States plays a leading role in return for providing a security guarantee. It could contribute to launching a debate on the credibility of the US commitment to the collective defence pledge in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty at a time when the meaning of collective defence is being reconsidered, owing in part to the emergence of new challenges such as cyberwarfare. Some European allied observers hold that the complete withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe would be interpreted, at least in some quarters of the alliance, as an *ipso facto* weakening of the credibility of the US extended deterrent. The implications for assurance of the NATO European allies could therefore be profound.

The consequences of the withdrawal of the remaining US nuclear weapons in Europe would include the loss of the crisis management options provided by an alliance deterrent posture involving aircraft from multiple allies. This arrangement makes possible the transmission to adversaries of a political signal—one of a united and resolute alliance—distinct from a US (or British or French) national action. It is difficult to imagine an alternative to the current arrangements for nuclear risk- and responsibility-sharing that would provide equivalent benefits for alliance cohesion as well as assurance and extended deterrence, but the examination of other approaches may well be an issue in the alliance's Strategic Concept review. In this review assurance and extended deterrence will be considered in a dynamic context involving other NATO policy challenges—including missile defence, relations with Russia, the meaning of collective defence in light of new risks, force transformation (including aircraft modernization), arms control and disarmament, and current operations, notably in Afghanistan. The tradeoffs that may be made remain to be seen.