

Towards Zero: nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation – UNA-UK Briefing Report no. 3

Theatre Nuclear Weapons in Europe

Status & Prospects for Change

Report written for the United Nations Association of the UK

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Cover photo:

B61 thermonuclear bomb, Wings over the Rockies Air and Space Museum, Denver, Colorado, 2013. © Dan Leeth/Alamy

Contents

1	History, current status, recent NATO decisions	5
2	The politics of TNW: why NATO is deadlocked	7
3	Deconstructing the justifications for NATO TNW.....	11
4	Saving NATO: how TNW can be eliminated from Europe.....	13

“It is high time to hold a meaningful dialogue between NATO and Russia on nuclear issues in general, and on tactical nuclear weapons in particular. Such talks could inject a positive note into NATO–Russia relations, bring about greater transparency and enhance mutual trust. This would then increase the likelihood of further weapons reductions and bring us closer to our goal of eliminating tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.”

Radoslaw Sikorski, Foreign minister of Poland,

Jonas Gahr Store, Foreign minister of Norway.

NATO, Russia and Tactical Nuclear Arms. Letter to the New York Times

14 May, 2012

History, current status, recent NATO decisions

It is a seldom-remarked fact that, 22 years after the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) still deploys scores of nuclear weapons on the territory of five Allied nations in Europe: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.¹ The exact number of U.S. nuclear weapons hosted by NATO Allies in Europe remains classified, including the numbers in each host country; however, a widely accepted estimate from the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* gives a total of 180 nuclear gravity bombs deployed in the five host Allied nations mentioned above.²

These numbers are vastly reduced from Cold War days, of course – at its peak, NATO's nuclear arsenal included some 7,300 theatre nuclear weapons (TNW).³ Unlike strategic nuclear forces, reduced via a series of bilateral treaties between the United States and the Soviet Union, NATO TNW have so far been reduced by unilateral action of the weapons' owners – the U.S. government. President George H.W. Bush acknowledged the effective end of the Cold War in a 27 September, 1991 televised speech that came to be known as the first of several Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI). The U.S. removed all its land-based TNW from Europe, and several weeks later NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) agreed to lower its nuclear gravity bomb holdings by 50%, from 1,400 to 700.⁴ As General Sir Hugh Beach has noted, 'By 1993 NATO had reduced the number of nuclear weapons available for its sub-strategic forces in Europe by 85 per cent. By 1994 the US army had been completely denuclearised.'⁵

At present, the 180-or-so B61 gravity bombs in NATO's nuclear arsenal are stored at military facilities in the five host Allied nations: Kleine Brogel Air Base in Belgium, Volkel Air Base in the Netherlands, Aviano Air Base in Italy, Büchel Air Base in Germany, and Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.⁶ Although the facilities are operated by host country military forces, the weapons themselves are stored and maintained by special units of the U.S. Air Force assigned to each of the bases.

NATO policy on the deployment and potential use of these weapons has changed little since the end of the Cold War, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

From NATO's Strategic Concept, 1991:⁸

- *The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war. They will continue to fulfil an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies' response to military aggression. They demonstrate that aggression of any kind is not a rational option.*
- *Nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance. The Alliance will therefore maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe.*
- *The Allies concerned consider that, with the radical changes in the security situation, including conventional force levels in Europe maintained in relative balance and increased reaction times, NATO's ability to defuse a crisis through diplomatic and other means or, should it be necessary, to mount a successful conventional defence will significantly improve. The circumstances in which*

1 See <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/issues/nato-nuclear-policies/index.htm>.

2 Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, "US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, 2011", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 67(1) 64-73, p. 65. Accessed at <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/67/1/64.full.pdf+html>

3 The terms Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW), Sub-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (SSNW) and Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) are often used to describe a specific class of nuclear weapon: with relatively small-yield warheads with ranges shorter than both intercontinental-range land, and submarine-launched weapons (ICBMs and SLBMs); and the intermediate-range weapons (such as the Soviet SS-20 and U.S. Pershing II) which the U.S. and Soviet Union agreed to ban under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

However, many find the use of 'tactical' and 'non-strategic' inappropriate in this context for two reasons: first, the 180-or-so NATO weapons currently in this category are theatre, as opposed to truly short-range tactical, nuclear weapons (such as nuclear artillery shells); and second, as has been pointed out by many observers, during the Cold War the West Germans would have considered any nuclear use on their territory (as contemplated both by NATO and by the Soviet Union) to be 'strategic'. It is also worth noting that the U.S. B61 nuclear gravity bomb under discussion here is also a strategic – i.e., intercontinental-range – in the sense that it may be transported as the payload of the B-2 *Spirit* stealth bomber, an aircraft with an approximate range of 11,000 kilometres. This paper therefore uses 'TNW' to mean 'theatre nuclear weapons' – physically located within a military theatre of operations, unlike strategic weapons, which are located at a greater remove from potential targets.

4 Susan J. Koch, *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2012), pp. 21-22. Accessed via http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/CSWMD-CaseStudy/CSWMD_CaseStudy-5.pdf.

5 Hugh Beach, "Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Europe's Redundant WMD", *Disarmament Diplomacy*, Issue No. 77, May/June 2004, accessed via <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd77/77hb.htm>.

“Thus NATO finds itself in an uncomfortable situation: There is no consensus to change the nuclear status quo; but neither is there, as will be shown in the next section, consensus to maintain it – a certain recipe for eventual trouble”

any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated by them are therefore even more remote.

From NATO's Strategic Concept, 2010:⁹

- *Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy. The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.*
- *We will ensure that NATO has the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of our populations. Therefore, we will:*
 - *maintain an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces;*
 - *ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defence planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces, and in command, control and consultation arrangements;*
 - *continue to review NATO's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance, taking into account changes to the evolving international security environment.*

The last point, which resulted in the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR), left alive the hopes of certain Allies that NATO might substantially rethink its nuclear policies and/or posture, with a view to drastic reductions in, or even elimination of, all NATO TNW in Europe.¹⁰

The publication of the DDPR final report at the 2012 Chicago Summit¹¹ effectively ended such speculation, at least for the immediate future. The DDPR stated, *inter alia*:

- *Nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence alongside conventional and missile defence forces. The review has shown that the Alliance's nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture.*
- *Consistent with our commitment to remain a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons exist, Allies agree that the NAC [North Atlantic Council] will task the appropriate committees to develop concepts for how to ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies concerned (i.e. all members of the Nuclear Planning Group) in their nuclear sharing arrangements, including in case NATO were to decide to reduce its reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe.*

Thus NATO finds itself in an uncomfortable situation: There is no consensus to change the nuclear status quo; but neither is there, as will be shown in the next section, consensus to maintain it – a certain recipe for eventual trouble.

6 Hans M. Kristensen, presentation to members of Belgian and Dutch Parliaments, 1 March 2005, accessed via <http://www.nukestrat.com/pubs/Eurobrief2.pdf>, Slides 7-17.

7 Report of the Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management, Phase II: Review of the DoD Nuclear Mission, December 2008, p. 61. Accessed via http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/PhaseIIReport_Final.pdf

8 NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept", 8 November 1991, paras 54-56. Accessed via http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm

9 NATO, "Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon", 19 November 2010, paras 17-19. Accessed via http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68580.htm.

10 Edmond E. Seay III, "Dissecting the DDPR: NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review and the Future of Nuclear Sharing", ACA/BASIC/IFSH Nuclear Policy Paper No. 10, July 2012, accessed via <http://www.basincint.org/publications/ted-seay-policy-consultant/2012/dissecting-ddpr>

11 NATO, "Deterrence and Defence Posture Review", 20 May 2012, paras 8-12. Accessed via <http://www.nato.int/cps/>

The politics of TNW: why NATO is deadlocked

The political situation in which NATO finds itself over TNW stems from several contradictory factors:

- Disgruntled host nations
- Apprehensive eastern Allies, including the Baltic States
- A straitened Turkey
- A doctrinaire France
- An absence of U.S. leadership

For many years, NATO conceived of TNW as a rung in the 'escalation ladder', intended to signal resolve to opponents (the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies) if they were ever tempted to attack Alliance territory.¹² Ever since 1991, however, interest in reducing and potentially eliminating the TNW component from NATO's range of responses has increased. Popular support for TNW in the five current host nations is low, and has never been strongly positive. In the most recent comprehensive survey of public opinion in the host allied nations, done in 2006, nearly 70% of respondents favoured removal of all nuclear weapons from Europe. Worse still, a solid two-thirds did not even know of the presence of NATO TNW in their country before taking the survey. As the polling organisation stated at the time, 'there is clearly potential for public concern to intensify if awareness of the presence of nuclear weapons increases'.¹³

It is important here to identify the main reason behind the vast lack of public awareness of the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in their home countries – deliberate NATO policy:

Once FOTL [Follow-On To Lance, NATO's principal short-range nuclear ballistic missile in the 1960's and 1970's] had been cancelled, as well as the upgrade for nuclear artillery, and the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty had eliminated all longer-range missiles, only dual-capable aircraft remained available for SACEUR's [The Supreme Allied Commander Europe] use as a nuclear deterrent. The rancor raised by the FOTL debate carried forward in to a broad public concern over any nuclear forces, thereby putting the spotlight on DCA [Dual-Capable Aircraft]. In response, NATO chose over the next 15 years to minimize public discussion or awareness of this aspect of its deterrent mission.¹⁴

Nor is public opinion the only measure of discontent among the host nations: In 2005, the Belgian Senate voted unanimously to ask the government of the day to reconsider hosting NATO TNW;¹⁵ and in 2010, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told the Bundestag regarding NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept debates, 'Of course it is necessary to include tactical nuclear weapons in this discussion. We remain committed to their withdrawal'.¹⁶

On the other hand, several Allies are firmly committed to continuing B61 deployment in Europe. Most prominent among these are the former Soviet Republics of the Baltic region: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These Allies are, as some have noted, 'Article 5 fundamentalists'; that is, they take the guarantee of mutual defence at the heart of the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's 1949 founding document, very seriously indeed:

"Popular support for TNW in the five current host nations is low, and has never been strongly positive. In the most recent comprehensive survey of public opinion in the host allied nations, done in 2006, nearly 70% of respondents favoured removal of all nuclear weapons from Europe"

12 Beatrice Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities? Strategies and Beliefs in Britain, France and the FRG*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 3.

13 Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Survey Results in Six European Countries, study coordinated by Strategic Communications for Greenpeace International, 25 May 2006, p. 7. Accessed via <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/publications/reports/nuclear-weapons-in-europe-survey/>

14 Jeffrey A. Larsen, "The Future of U.S. Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons and Implications for NATO: Drifting Toward the Foreseeable Future", NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 31 October 2006, p. 27.

15 Belgian Senate resolution, adopted unanimously April 21, 2005. Accessed via <http://www.nukestrat.com/us/afn/BelgiumSenate032205.pdf>

16 'Foreign Minister Westerwelle's statement to the German Bundestag on NATO's Strategic Concept, 11 November 2010'. Accessed via <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2010/101111-BM-BT-Nato-Rede.html>

“Other nations oppose changes to NATO’s current nuclear posture and policy, notably Turkey and France. Ankara is in a very difficult position: located so close to the Middle East, yet an active member of NATO and concerned about Russian activities in the Caucasus”

As NATO prepared to write its new Strategic Concept in 2010, therefore, there was concern in CEE [Central and Eastern European] states that Russia was already in the midst of an assertive campaign to use ambiguous means, such as cyber attacks, energy cutoffs, and local ethnic unrest, to intimidate and even attack its neighbors. Regarding the Alliance, the CEE states in particular were concerned that such measures would not reach the Article 5 threshold or that NATO decisionmaking and response would be too slow to be effective.

There is a clear nuclear element to these demands for reassurance. Senior leaders in the Baltic states, Poland, and Czech Republic interviewed for this paper expressed, in the main, deep opposition to unilateral NATO nuclear reductions, although the Poles have been vocal in supporting the elimination of NSNW in exchange for matching reductions in Russia.¹⁷

Other nations oppose changes to NATO’s current nuclear posture and policy, notably Turkey and France. Ankara is in a very difficult position: located so close to the Middle East, yet an active member of NATO and concerned about Russian activities in the Caucasus. As a 2009 study noted,

*Turkey’s location has added an element of both risk and opportunity to NATO nuclear sharing. Turkey’s close proximity to states deemed potentially hostile, such as Iran and Syria, make Turkey a preferred NATO base for tactical nuclear weapons. The risk, of course, is that stationing tactical nuclear weapons in Turkey might provoke a pre-emptive strike upon NATO bases. Turkish parliamentarians have expressed to NATO the difficulty of explaining the continued presence of US tactical nuclear weapons on Turkish territory to Muslim and Arab neighbors. There is a fear that they undermine Turkey’s clear diplomatic objectives to act as a mediator within the region.*¹⁸

France is a different case, with a uniquely individualistic approach:

*Instead of focusing on operational arguments, the French nuclear debate is ruled by metaphysical, metastrategic considerations. Arguments either support or challenge ‘deterrence as it was set up by General de Gaulle’ (although we know that it was not he who created the main dogma) and thus, they support or challenge the political system, the nuclear monarchy he created.*¹⁹

This French perspective has had direct operational consequences, not least for NATO:

*Since the first French nuclear bombers became operational in the mid-1960s, French nuclear strategy could develop independently from that of NATO. France’s withdrawal in 1966 from its integrated military structure was explained as flowing logically from France’s newly found (nuclear) defence self-sufficiency. French governments since de Gaulle claimed that nuclear weapons alone allowed France to recover her full sovereignty, by deterring a Soviet attack and resisting the domination of the US (France’s principal rival).*²⁰

This set of beliefs has been embraced by French society as a whole, despite political differences:

*Most importantly – and there could be no argument about the popularity of this concept – nuclear weapons made France immune to war, any war, to German revanchism as much as to a Soviet threat or a threat from any other direction on the compass. Nuclear weapons, in France more than anywhere else, were believed to be the magic that would keep war at bay. Where independence was the be-all and end-all in relations with allies and enemies alike, cohesion became the greatest desideratum of domestic politics. By eliminating discussions about what one would fight for and how France’s defence was to be achieved, nuclear weapons allowed France to overcome internal disagreements which had arguably contributed to France’s defeats in 1870-1 and 1940. By putting enormous military power in the hands of the President, this responsibility was removed from the citizens (or conscript forces), the professional military (only half-trusted), and detached from the potential for disagreement characteristic of democracies. Nuclear weapons thus served, above all, the external and internal standing of the French President, and through him, of the State, which recovered the prestige lost during the Second World War.*²¹

17 Hans Binnendijk and Catherine McArdle Kelleher, “NATO Reassurance and Nuclear Reductions: Creating the Conditions”, *Transatlantic Current*, January 2012, pp. 2-3. Accessed via <http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/publications/articles/NATO%20Reassurance%20and%20Nuclear%20Reductions%20Creating%20the%20Conditions.pdf>

18 Claudine Lamond and Paul Ingram, “Politics around US tactical nuclear weapons in European host states”, *BASIC Getting to Zero Papers*, No. 11, 23 January 2009, p. 4. Accessed via <http://www.basincint.org/sites/default/files/gtz11.pdf>.

19 Heuser *ibid.*, p. 143.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

Clearly France's belief in maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent force, and its closely related views on NATO TNW, will require more than a bit of debate around the North Atlantic Council table to modify.

Finally, there is U.S. policy to consider. It is a commonplace observation that change within NATO requires U.S. leadership. In the case of TNW, nuclear sharing and NATO's nuclear posture and policy, that leadership has been notably absent; nor is this a new phenomenon. The Clinton administration had a signal opportunity to withdraw all U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe as part of its Nuclear Posture Review of 1993-94, following the Presidential Nuclear Initiative reductions noted above. However, 'the Review failed in this respect due to bureaucratic opposition, conservative thinking, and a lack of political leadership, including by President Bill Clinton'.²² Nor have things been much different under the Obama administration. Due both to the differences of opinion within the Alliance on TNW withdrawal noted above, and to political horse-trading in the U.S. Senate required to win ratification of the New START Treaty in December 2010,²³ President Obama was forced to agree, *inter alia*, to modernisation of NATO's B61 nuclear arsenal;²⁴ and having taken that step, his Administration was no longer so tightly bound to the logic of nuclear disarmament as so eloquently expressed in the President's April 2009 speech in Prague.²⁵

There is a specific actor within the U.S. government which has prevented either the Clinton or Obama administrations from (so far) returning all NATO TNW to the U.S. for storage and/or destruction: the U.S. Department of Defense. In a 2008 report mandated by the Secretary of Defense, a blue-ribbon panel led by former Secretary of Defense (and Energy, where responsibility for U.S. nuclear weapons development lies) James Schlesinger made the following observations about the role of the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) in managing nuclear weapons within its area of responsibility:

*USEUCOM, long the principal advocate for nuclear weapons in Europe, now abstains from its advocacy role. It no longer recognizes the political imperative of U.S. nuclear weapons within the Alliance. This attitude is held at the senior levels of USEUCOM and permeates the staffs. In the view of one senior leader referring to nuclear weapons in Europe: "We pay a king's ransom for these things and...they have no military value."*²⁶

Interestingly, the Schlesinger panel responded to this professional military advice with political opinion:

*In the long-held view of USEUCOM, deterrence provided by USSTRATCOM's [U.S. Strategic Command, responsible for all U.S. strategic nuclear weapons] strategic nuclear capabilities outside of Europe are more cost effective. 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.*²⁷

And even more dismissively:

*DCA fighters and nuclear weapons are visible, capable, recallable, reusable, and flexible and are a military statement of NATO and U.S. 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. Nuclear weapons in Europe provide a continuous deterrence element; as long as our allies value their political contribution, the United States is obligated to provide and maintain the nuclear weapon capability.*²⁸

Nor is the US Department of Defense's intransigence on NATO TNW reductions confined to Washington DC. NATO's High-Level Group (HLG), the senior advisory body to the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) on nuclear policy and planning issues, is chaired by the U.S. government in the person of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy. Unsurprisingly, the HLG is a strong advocate for maintaining NATO's present nuclear policy.

"It is a commonplace observation that change within NATO requires U.S. leadership. In the case of TNW, nuclear sharing and NATO's nuclear posture and policy, that leadership has been notably absent; nor is this a new phenomenon"

22 Tom Sauer and Bob van der Zwaan, "U.S. Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe after NATO's Lisbon Summit: Why Their Withdrawal Is Desirable and Feasible," Belfer Center Discussion Paper, No. 2011-05, Harvard Kennedy School, May 2011, p. 9. Accessed via <http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/us-tactical-nuclearweapons-in-europe.pdf>.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

24 Bill Gertz, "Inside the Ring," *Washington Times*, December 17, 2009.

25 See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu_n_183219.html.

26 Report of the Secretary of Defense *ibid.*, p. 59.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

With no consensus available either to maintain or to change NATO's nuclear *status quo*, useful action within the Alliance seems unlikely at present. The next section takes a deeper look at the justifications most often given for retaining NATO TNW in Europe.

Deconstructing the justifications for NATO TNW

If we are to make any progress in the TNW debate, the justifications most often given for retaining these weapons in Europe deserve careful scrutiny: deterrence, assurance, and burden-sharing.

Deterrence: As noted above, the Schlesinger panel report claimed that NATO TNW provide a ‘continuous deterrent element’; however, an essential condition for deterrent effect is credibility, and NATO’s TNW have little or none. The current delivery platforms, the U.S. General Dynamics F-16 and the European Panavia *Tornado*, are both nearing the end of their scheduled service lives.²⁹ They are both tactical fighter-bombers of limited range, and the prospect of sending them in harm’s way loaded with B61 payloads, supported both by aerial refuelling assets and by massive suppression of enemy air defence (SEAD) missions by other NATO aircraft,³⁰ truly beggars belief – especially when the same mission could be carried out far more safely and effectively by the strategic military assets of the U.S. or UK governments.

Beyond military operational questions, there is the matter of political credibility for NATO’s TNW – quite simply, Germany will not join consensus to attack the Russian Federation with these weapons, and Turkey will likewise prevent any action against Iran involving NATO TNW.³¹ It is important to reinforce here that, as a consensus organisation, unless 28 nations say ‘yes’, nothing happens at NATO.

Assurance: The ability of NATO’s TNW to reassure Allies is clearly in question:

Although a consensus has yet to emerge, no matter how extended deterrence is dealt with by NATO members, it is different, albeit related to reassurance. If extended deterrence is seen to fail, reassurance will obviously fail as well.³²

As noted above, extended deterrence through NATO TNW (as opposed to the strategic forces of NATO’s three Nuclear Weapon States, principally the United States) has failed through a lack of credibility – NATO B61s deter no one. How, then, can they reassure Allies?

Burden-sharing: It is frequently asserted that NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangements prove to the U.S. that European Allies are willing and able to share the burdens relating to extended deterrence, financial and otherwise:

The present combination of U.S. B-61 bombs and dual-capable aircraft (DCA) seems to represent affirmative symbols of moral burden-sharing based on common values—the schicksalsgemeinschaft, or shared community of fate—within the transatlantic relationship, this at a time when the United States is announcing its shift of strategic attention to the Pacific (but Alliance solidarity may be further weakened by the predictable intra-allied disputes which have been seen to occur whenever TNW issues become prominent).³³

However, on the American side of the Atlantic, burden-sharing seems to have other, preferred forms – namely troop contributions and money:

“The Schlesinger panel report claimed that NATO TNW provide a ‘continuous deterrent element’; however, an essential condition for deterrent effect is credibility, and NATO’s TNW have little or none”

29 Nick Childs, “Europe, NATO’s Tactical Nuclear Conundrum, And Public Debate: Be Careful What You Wish For”, *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and NATO*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), p. 303.

30 Norris and Kristensen *ibid.*, p. 68.

31 Edmond Seay, “NATO’s Incredible Nuclear Strategy: Why U.S. Weapons in Europe Deter No One”, *Arms Control Today*, November 2011, accessed via www.armscontrol.org/print/5110.

32 Binnendijk and Kelleher *ibid.*, p. 3.

33 Paul Schulte, “Tactical Nuclear Weapons In NATO And Beyond: A Historical And Thematic Examination”, *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and NATO*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), pp. 61-62.

This fact [that the transatlantic military capabilities gap had actually widened] was only reconfirmed when NATO took over command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in August 2003. Although the alliance took on a greater share of the burden in Afghanistan, this operation did nothing to suggest that a more equitable burden-sharing relationship between the US and its European allies had emerged. Indeed, if anything, the ISAF mission reinforced the notion that NATO was moving towards a 'tiered' alliance, with the US and just two or three key European allies contributing the vast majority of troops and capabilities. A number of nations also placed significant caveats on the use of their forces, generating bitter arguments within the alliance about the distribution of risks and burdens.³⁴

The desire for fiscal burden-sharing was probably best expressed by outgoing U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in his valedictory address to NATO:

The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress – and in the American body politic writ large – to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense.³⁵

The final section of this paper will examine how NATO can (and must) take action to remove TNW from Europe, or else risk the very existence of the Alliance and/or pre-empt a further retrogression in diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation.

³⁴ Ellen Hallams and Benjamin Schreer, "Towards a 'post-American' alliance? NATO burden-sharing after Libya", *International Affairs* 88: 2 (2012), p. 317.

³⁵ Robert Burns, "Gates Blasts NATO, Questions Future of Alliance", *Associated Press*, June 10, 2011.

Saving NATO: how TNW can be eliminated from Europe

What factors militate against maintaining the current nuclear impasse within NATO? As noted above, the current NATO DCA are nearing the end of their useful lifespans, and will depart the scene over the next decade or so if they undergo life-extension upgrades – if not, they could be decertified for nuclear missions in the very near future.³⁶

The only replacement aircraft for NATO's current DCA fleet of F-16s and Tornados is the troubled F-35, plagued by delays and cost overruns on a scale that has already frightened off some potential buyers.³⁷

Nor is DCA replacement the only major cost issue for NATO: The B61 itself, as was noted above, is to be modernised – but at what cost? The latest estimates are bracing: Over US\$10 billion and rising – and this is against an official estimate from early 2012 of 'only' US\$4 billion.³⁸ In addition, the two sets of costs noted above interact: Preparing the F-35 to carry the modernised B61-12 will itself cost at least an additional US\$340 million.³⁹

As well as costs, there is the prospect of destroying what little currently remains of the NATO-Russia relationship if B61 modernisation and F-35 procurement plans are carried out:

Unlike current DCA, which would require a massive Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) campaign in order to have any realistic hope of reaching targets in, for instance, Russia or Iran, the low-observable F-35 might be able to reach its target undetected with its super-precise nuclear payload intact and armed. This is not a scenario that Russia, for instance, could view with equanimity. If allowed to come to fruition, in fact, such a PGM/Stealth Nuclear could eliminate any hope of further progress in reducing or eliminating NSNW in Europe as a whole.⁴⁰

Russia has consistently put forward a simple precondition for discussing TNW reductions with the U.S. or NATO – removal of TNW to their national territory. Hiding behind this demand has allowed the Russian Federation to do nothing about its own, significantly larger, TNW arsenal. If, as argued above, NATO TNW do not deter potential foes and therefore cannot reassure allies, why not call Moscow's bluff and return the B61 force in Europe to the continental U.S.? That would, at a minimum, make possible meaningful discussions with the Russians on issues that really matter to both sides:

- Talks on replacing the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty with a modern version that deals with Russian concerns about precision-guided munitions
- Concrete cooperation on ballistic missile defence in Europe, beginning with the threat from South-West Asia/Iran
- Preliminary discussions on how NATO can help ensure that Russia feels secure on its western borders, while Central and Eastern European NATO Allies feel secure from Russian aggression

In the absence of a major and sustained effort by the Obama administration to gain consensus for such discussions, other outcomes are possible; however, they would most likely have dire

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³⁶ Larsen *ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁷ “Canada Convenes International Meeting Over Troubled F-35 Fighters”, Reuters/Postmedia News, February 11, 2012.

³⁸ Hans Kristensen, “B61-12: NNSA's Gold-Plated Nuclear Bomb Project”, Federation of American Scientists Strategic Security Blog, accessed via <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2012/07/b61-12gold.php>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ted Seay, “Escalation By Default? The Danger Facing NATO's Deterrent Nuclear Force”, NATO Policy Brief No. 2, European Leadership Network, March 2012, p. 4. Accessed via <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2012/05/10/e074ba2d/ELN%20NATO%20Policy%20Brief%202%20-%20Escalation%20by%20Default.pdf>

“The outcome most likely to cause problems for NATO would be unilateral action by one (or more) of the five hosting nations asking the U.S. to remove its B61s from their territory”

consequences for Alliance solidarity. The outcome most likely to cause problems for NATO would be unilateral action by one (or more) of the five hosting nations asking the U.S. to remove its B61s from their territory.

Even though all Allies abide by the agreement reached in Chicago as part of the DDPR, that document's support for continued B61 deployment in Europe rang hollow – those Allies which opposed continued deployment were stymied by (in particular) French intransigence, with predictable consequences:

There appears to be a shared belief among a number of legislators in The Hague, Brussels and Berlin that their disarmament concerns have been trumped by the French in particular, and that further action within normal NATO committee structures would be futile. This could pave the way for one of them to request that the United States remove its B61s. NATO would have no say in this interaction, nor would the U.S. government be in a position to refuse. It is conceivable that great pressure could be brought to bear on a government which chose to act in this fashion, both bilaterally from the United States and through NATO, but a government which stuck to its position in response to domestic pressures could see U.S. nuclear weapons off its soil in a matter of weeks.⁴¹

There is no chance that NATO can muddle through the current TNW/DCA situation, for the reasons noted above; in particular, the German government, having publicly stated its strong preference for TNW removal from German soil, cannot now go back to voters and explain its agreement to spend money to either replace its aging DCA fleet or even extend its life by more than a few more years:

The Eurofighter that Germany is now introducing into service as its main combat aircraft would need to be nuclear certified and fitted with the necessary avionics package to carry nuclear weapons, which the Bundestag would not support.⁴²

Since something must be done, and the option of unilateral action by hosting nations would not be beneficial to the stability or even, perhaps, longevity of NATO, it behoves the Obama administration to take the lead in finding a solution to NATO's TNW problem sooner rather than later. While politically difficult in the narrow sense (i.e., American politicians have rarely benefitted from being seen as The Great Disarmer), President Obama has a golden opportunity to follow through on his April 2009 Prague speech on nuclear disarmament:

So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons... There is violence and injustice in our world that must be confronted. We must confront it not by splitting apart but by standing together as free nations, as free people. I know that a call to arms can stir the souls of men and women more than a call to lay them down. But that is why the voices for peace and progress must be raised together. Those are the voices that still echo through the streets of Prague. Those are the ghosts of 1968. Those were the joyful sounds of the Velvet Revolution. Those were the Czechs who helped bring down a nuclear-armed empire without firing a shot.⁴³

The opportunity for President Obama to leave his footprints in the sands of history began with his re-election in November 2012. However much political opposition he faces, the opportunity to redeem his Prague vision, which most observers see as substantially unfulfilled,⁴⁴ has begun and the clock is now ticking.

The Obama administration has stated its intentions to further reduce nuclear weapons in concert with the Russian Federation;⁴⁵ prospects for real progress over the next four years remain slim, however, due to strong disagreements over, *inter alia*, U.S. plans for ballistic missile defence in Europe.⁴⁶ What is needed is a bold move to break the current impasse, and NATO action on removing TNW would fill that bill nicely – the cost savings and reductions in intra-Alliance tensions would be excellent side benefits.

The best plan would be for President Obama to assert a leadership role in convincing recalcitrant Allies that TNW can and should be removed from Europe with no diminution of NATO security;

41 Edmond E. Seay III, “Theatre Nuclear Weapons and the next round of bilateral New START Treaty follow-on talks”, ACA/BASIC/IFSH Nuclear Policy Paper No. 12, January 2013, accessed via <http://www.basicint.org/publications/ted-seay-policy-consultant/2013/theatre-nuclear-weapons-and-next-round-bilateral-new-st>, p. 10.

42 George Perkovich, et. al., *Looking Beyond the Chicago Summit: Nuclear Weapons in Europe and the Future of NATO*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2012), p. 4.

43 Speech by President Barack Obama in Prague, Czech Republic, 9 April 2009. Accessed via http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu_n_183219.html

44 Steven Pifer and Michael O'Hanlon, “Nuclear Arms Control Opportunities: An Agenda for Obama's Second Term”, *Arms Control Today*, December 2012, accessed via http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2012_12/Nuclear-Arms-Control-Opportunities-An-Agenda-for-Obamas-Second-Term

45 R. Jeffrey Smith, “Obama administration embraces major new nuclear weapons cut”. Available at <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2013/02/08/12156/obama-administration-embraces-major-new-nuclear-weapons-cut>

46 Nikolai Korchunov, “You Say Defense, We See Threat”, *New York Times*, 6 June 2012, accessed via www.nytimes.com/2012/06/07/opinion/you-say-defense-we-see-threat.html.

in France's case, there could be explicit pledges not to target the independent French nuclear force for NATO arms control efforts – which would not, in any event, make any sense, since the Force de Frappe is entirely independent of NATO by long-standing French policy.

One final thought on TNW withdrawal from Europe: A decade ago, NATO TNW were based in seven, not five, Allied nations. Their removal from RAF Station Lakenheath and from Araxos Air Base in Greece during the past decade took place in utter secrecy⁴⁷, yet neither episode of TNW withdrawal sparked a crisis in confidence among Allies, nor did either incident feature prominently in the series of nuclear reviews undertaken by the U.S. or NATO from 2009-2012. In short, their removal was treated very much as business as usual.

⁴⁷ Hans Kristensen, "U.S. Nuclear Weapons Withdrawn From the United Kingdom", Federation of American Scientists Strategic Security Blog, 26 June 2008, accessed via <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2008/06/us-nuclear-weapons-withdrawn-from-the-united-kingdom.php>

It is a seldom-remarked fact that, 22 years after the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) still deploys scores of nuclear weapons on the territory of five Allied nations in Europe: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

With relatively small-yield warheads and with ranges shorter than both intercontinental-range land-based and submarine-launched weapons, or intermediate-range weapons, these weapons are commonly referred to as tactical or theatre nuclear weapons. Seen by many as obsolete, they remain, however, a central component of NATO's strategic defence. They also represent a strong point of diplomatic contention between the United States and its NATO Allies, and the Russian Federation.

With the weapons themselves and their transport aircraft reaching the end of their deployment lives, Ted Seay, a respected independent arms control and disarmament consultant with an unrivalled knowledge of the weapons and the politics surrounding them, seeks to address what the future holds for theatre nuclear weapons in Europe and the Alliance that they serve.

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