



# ELN

EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP NETWORK FOR  
MULTILATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT  
AND NONPROLIFERATION

## European Leadership Network for Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

### *“NATO Deterrence and Defence Posture after Lisbon*

Tuesday 25 January 2011

#### MEETING REPORT

#### 1. Introduction

On Tuesday 25 January 2010, the second plenary meeting of the European Leadership Network for Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation took place in London. The meeting for the most part was conducted off the record. This summary does not therefore attribute comments to specific individuals. Where individuals agreed to have their own formal statements published, links are provided to these separate statements throughout this document as appropriate. A full list of participants at the meeting appears at the end of this note.

The meeting addressed a number of themes. These were:

- The outcomes of the Lisbon summit and the current context of NATO policy making on deterrence and defence posture;
- Forward options for NATO nuclear posture;
- Next Steps in the NATO-Russia relationship.

This summary is structured around each of these themes. Before turning to them, the attention of readers is drawn to a series of questions circulated in advance of the meeting, by the ELN Secretariat, as a suggested framework for the discussion, namely:

- What is the rationale for the current NATO nuclear force posture?
- Is that posture the only way of achieving the objective of alliance cohesion and maintaining the transatlantic link?
- What is the role and relevance of Ballistic Missile Defence in this equation? Can BMD be the ‘new glue’ for the alliance?
- Is it now credible and feasible for conventional deterrence to replace some current nuclear roles?
- What alternative nuclear sharing arrangements in NATO might be possible?
- What alternative approaches to consultation on the nuclear mission within the Alliance might it be possible to develop?
- Do any of the alternatives to the status quo offer the prospect of reassuring alliance members who would be concerned by the removal of US non-strategic nuclear weapons stationed in Europe?
- What is the relevance of Russian sub strategic nuclear forces to the NATO Review?
- What are the prospects for engagement with Russia on its own nuclear weapons in Europe, as called for in the NATO Strategic Concept?
- What issues would a serious engagement with Russia need to address?

## **2. Outcomes of the Lisbon Summit**

In advance of the meeting, participants received a briefing paper on the Lisbon outcomes from Simon Lunn and Ian Kearns. This paper can be accessed [here](#). At the meeting itself participants heard opening comments on this theme from Jamie Shea, Simon Lunn, Volker Ruhe, and a statement from Jan Kavan that can be found [here](#). These contributions preceded a wide-ranging discussion. The summary below is based on the full discussion, not only on the opening comments.

### **2.1 Discussion**

Several contributors described the outcome of the Lisbon summit as a classic NATO compromise the function of which was to maintain political cohesion in an alliance marked by differences of opinion. Participants were reminded that the context for the summit had been a desire among some members, principally those with concerns about Russia, to preserve the transatlantic link and strengthen commitments to collective security under Article V. Others less concerned about Russia though still in favour of collective security and a strong transatlantic link, had approached the summit pushing for stronger NATO leadership on nuclear disarmament. In particular, some of this latter group had been pushing for the removal of US sub-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe and had downplayed the significance of their removal for NATO cohesion.

The compromise agreed at Lisbon had a number of related elements. On the one hand, the text of the summit documents responded to the concerns of those seeking reassurance on Article V: The documents contained, for example, updated material on conventional force contingency planning and the first Article V exercises in 10 years were announced.

On the other hand, the Lisbon documents also indicated that a much wider review of NATO deterrence and defence posture would now take place. The ELN meeting heard that there was no fixed timeline for this review. It was thought likely that it would go on at least until the summit in the US in 2012 but the situation was not clear. It was also not yet fully clear as to whether the review would be of posture, in the sense of capabilities, or policy, in the sense of re-thinking whether deterrence ought still to be the founding principle. Despite the uncertainties, it was thought the review would be likely to examine the following issues:

- The relevance of deterrence as a concept at this point in history and in particular consideration of whether deterrence could still be said to work given the onset of challenges like cyber attacks and the possibility of WMD terrorism;
- The linkages between nuclear and conventional defence and deterrence components and the linkage of these strands to that of missile defence in shaping the overall NATO posture;
- Consideration of how best to link the review to the NATO transformation agenda already in place;
- Consideration of how to link the NATO review to the next steps in the US-Russia arms control negotiations, especially given that Russia sees its nuclear forces as compensation, to some extent, for conventional weakness;
- Consideration of whether NATO could bind Russia into a common missile defence arrangement, if not a common system;
- Consideration of the extent to which US sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe should or could be used as a bargaining chip to secure greater transparency, and possibly withdrawals, of Russian sub-strategic nuclear weapons stationed in Europe;
- Examination of what more NATO could do to make real its stated commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons. It was noted, on this final issue, that some policy-makers believed NATO had already done enough while others thought further changes to NATO declaratory policy would be sufficient. Others still, including many at the ELN meeting, thought NATO needed to go further in taking practical disarmament steps of its own.

In discussion, the Lisbon outcomes were criticised by many participants at the meeting for not doing enough on NATO nuclear policy. This reluctance to do more, the criticism ran, was despite the fact that

the current US nuclear weapons stationed in Europe have no credible military utility and that some countries hosting them, such as Germany, are almost certain not to renew the dual-capable aircraft required to deliver them to target.

There was agreement among participants that the new NATO review represented a real opportunity but further strong criticism that NATO had produced only tidy compromises at Lisbon rather than genuine leadership or a demonstration of its own relevance. Some argued that in the 1950s NATO had clarity of mission, expressed as a desire to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in Europe. The new Strategic Concept had got nowhere near this level of clarity. Some suggested the new mission should be to keep out new threats, to bring the Russians in (via dialogue not membership), and to keep the Americans engaged. If it could begin to define its role in this way, NATO could still be relevant but if not, it ran the risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant to the real security challenges being faced.

### **3. Forward Options for NATO's nuclear posture**

In this section of the meeting, opening comments were received from Steve Andreasen, Vahit Erdem, Ruud Lubbers and Mustafa Kibaroglu. The meeting also received a written submission from Klaus Naumann that can be found [here](#). Again, the summary below is based on the full discussion, not only upon opening contributions.

#### **3.1 Discussion:**

Some participants expressed the view that the ambiguity of language formulated by the alliance at Lisbon was a form of political double-talk. This in turn created, or at least allowed, suspicion and mistrust among members of the alliance to grow. This wasn't helpful because many central and east European member states needed clear reassurance as a necessary precondition for their willingness to support a reset of relations with Russia, and, more specifically, to support moves such as the withdrawal of US sub-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe. The presence of NATO, and particularly US, facilities on central and eastern European soil was itself an important and symbolic demonstration of NATO commitment to such members. The challenge for the NATO deterrence and defence posture review was therefore said to be to go beyond Lisbon to find new ways of achieving the right balance between the required re-assurance on the one hand, and demonstrable leadership on nuclear disarmament on the other.

It was thought this would be helped by further work to agree a genuinely common threat assessment within the alliance itself. What was also needed, however, was creative thinking in a number of specific areas, namely:

- **Reduction and Consolidation of NATO Non-Strategic Nuclear Forces (NSNF) in Europe:** The removal of all U.S. NSNF from Europe should still be explored but NATO should also examine options to reduce (as opposed to eliminate) the U.S. NSNF stockpile in Europe, while either retaining all existing deployment sites in the process or pursuing a corresponding reduction in deployment sites. It should also examine a reduction in the number of countries with dedicated Dual Capable Aircraft (DCA), a move that could logically coincide with a reduction in deployment sites.
- **Nuclear sharing within the alliance:** NATO should examine new options, beyond storing U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, for ensuring that the nuclear mission within the alliance remains a shared responsibility. Ideas in this area are set out in a short paper by Steve Andreasen that can be found [here](#). Possibilities include enhanced nuclear consultations and planning arrangements within the alliance and the option that the U.S. could remove its NSNF's from Europe but retain DCA capability – either inside or outside of Europe – and the capability to redeploy U.S. NSNF back to Europe should that be required in future. The latter option would also require some European NATO nations to retain the infrastructure to both support U.S. DCA and the infrastructure for storage and security of U.S. non-strategic nuclear warheads, though there could also be European countries that retained a DCA capability of their own – either

nationally or as part of a joint European operation of some kind. If NATO were to decide that non-strategic nuclear forces were no longer required for deterrence purposes in Europe, additional options for re-assurance might relate to U.S. strategic nuclear forces, with periodic visits of U.S.-based B-52 or B-2 strategic bombers to European bases; or alternatively –and more on the planning side – the posting of European NATO officers to U.S. strategic bomber units. Sharing could also be centered on UK and French nuclear force capabilities, perhaps involving them to a greater degree with their NATO allies.

- **Reassurance:** Additionally on the re-assurance side of the equation if NATO were to change its nuclear posture, other options were thought to include possible evolutions of NATO conventional capabilities, changes to NATO non-nuclear contingency planning to re-assure some members, and further progress on NATO missile defense. Some also suggested changes to Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty to make defence of an attacked state compulsory. Participants were also aware, however, that wider reassurance was about the quality of diplomatic and political relationships and there was a strong mood at the meeting that more genuine engagement with each other on security concerns was fundamental to progress, as was deeper engagement with Russia.

Despite the difficulties and disagreements, the meeting heard that although many Central and Eastern European countries had concerns about changes to NATO nuclear posture, there was no determination on their part to oppose the withdrawal of non-strategic nuclear weapons at all costs. It was explained that these countries argued for such a decision to be contextualised by a fuller understanding of their threat perceptions and the relative balance of conventional forces between these countries and Russia.

Unanimously, the meeting agreed that there was a continuing need for political leadership on these issues at the highest levels and not just from President Obama. In Europe, this debate would benefit from an improved understanding of the complexity of the issues involved and a commitment to engage in further discussion and negotiation of their resolution.

#### **4. Next Steps in the NATO-Russia Relationship**

This part of the discussion was informed by a [speech](#) delivered to the group the evening before by former Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, and also by opening comments from Margaret Beckett, Hans Blix, Roderich Kiesewetter and Nikolai Sokov.

##### **4.1 Discussion**

This was the most challenging part of the meeting because it was agreed that mutual mistrust still characterised the NATO-Russia relationship, despite the fact that in a globalised world we ultimately must rely on each other for mutual security. Participants commented that, depending on ones perspective, both the events in former Yugoslavia in 1999 and in Georgia in 2008 had demonstrated that earlier warm words about cooperation had not entered the practice of security relations in the Euro-Atlantic area. As a result, NATO needed to do more to re-assure Russia, including by not seeking further expansion to the east, but Russia also needed to do more to re-assure its neighbours that events in Georgia would not be repeated.

Others moreover, pointed out that conventional force exercises and contingency planning steps, introduced to re-assure some members of NATO in relation to possible withdrawal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, could very easily alienate Russia and worsen the NATO-Russia relationship.

Despite this, there was widespread agreement that the language of 'strategic partnership' used at the NATO-Russia Lisbon summit in November 2010 was appropriate. Russia was not going to become a member of NATO but nor could Euro-Atlantic regional security be built without taking its interests into account. The notion of pursuing a strategic partnership as a middle course was therefore sensible. This

would require a number of elements, including genuine genuine political will. On the surface, this seemed to be there at Lisbon but it now also needed to be backed up by:

- The creation of shared NATO-Russia threat assessments;
- Practical cooperation on missile defence (though it was acknowledged by some participants that any attempt to build a joint NATO-Russia system could undermine the political reassurance value that some in eastern Europe were hoping to get out of the deployment of a NATO-wide system);
- Progress on conventional arms control in Europe and on the issue of both NATO and Russian non-strategic nuclear forces (about which more can be found in the statement by Nikolai Sokov [here](#));
- Cooperation to strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime;
- Cooperation on Afghanistan
- A further deepening of economic ties between the rest of Europe and Russia to build mutual economic dependence in ways beneficial to long-term cooperation.

More fundamentally, many participants at the meeting agreed that there was a need to move security strategies away from the deterrence principle and on to the ground of a mutual security community, in which diplomatic, legal and non-military dispute resolution methods became the norm across the entire Euro-Atlantic area. This required an intellectual and political focus on policy instruments not connected to the principle of deterrence, such as conflict prevention and improved intelligence gathering and sharing. However, there were no illusions about the difficulty of this task. Despite civilian leaderships and eminent figures calling for this change in both NATO and Russia, it was acknowledged that deterrence was deeply embedded in the military-security establishments across the U.S., Europe and Russia.

## **Conclusion**

On this sobering note, the meeting concluded with a commitment from ELN members to engage in further work on this agenda. In particular, the ELN would engage, in partnership with the Hoover Institution and NTI, in the debate on how to move beyond deterrence. It would also continue to work on NATO deterrence and defence posture, and on an ELN NATO-Russia dialogue that would be held in Berlin later in 2011. ELN delegations would also travel to the Baltic states, Poland and Turkey to better understand perspectives in those countries in the first half of 2011.

Working with the NTI in the U.S., it was noted that the ELN would be publishing research papers on both NATO nuclear policy and the role of nuclear weapons in the NATO-Russia relationship throughout the course of 2011. Details and papers will be posted on the ELN web-site at: [www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org) .

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