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# NATO's DNA: The Alliance's contribution to arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation

EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY  
REPORT

Simon Lunn and Nicholas Williams

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**The European Leadership Network (ELN) is an independent, non-partisan, pan-European network of nearly 200 past, present and future European leaders working to provide practical real-world solutions to political and security challenges.**

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## Policy recommendations

1. The active pursuit of arms control has slipped in NATO's priorities. This is a mistake; it should be upgraded and elevated into its proper position partnering military strength as a means of achieving security at the lowest possible level of armament. (para 43)
2. The scale of COVID-19 damage to national economies has been such that NATO should reconsider its 2% of GDP spending goal. (para 8)
3. The integration of arms control fully into NATO policy and action should be among the highest priorities of a new NATO Strategic Concept (para 126)
4. NATO should develop a new Comprehensive Concept for Arms Control and Disarmament that responds to contemporary security challenges. (para 72 )
5. NATO's military should be charged with the constant search for innovative arms control proposals in order to maintain security at the lowest level of armament and to promote military transparency and predictability. (para 45)
6. NATO's current organisational arrangements for arms control are insufficient. NATO should create a Division of Arms Control charged with ensuring that arms control considerations are fully reflected in NATO policies and initiatives. (para 61)
7. Arms control considerations should be fully integrated into the NATO Defence Planning Process. (para 65)
8. The Vienna Document and its confidence-building and transparency measures must be further strengthened (para 80) for example a moratorium on military exercises could be a first step in easing tensions in regions at risk. ( para 75)
9. NATO's collective voice must play a greater role in the development of an arms control framework for controlling and constraining conventional forces in Europe. (para 78)

10. Allies have been slow publicly to support New START treaty renewal. US allies individually and collectively should make known their full support for the renewal of the New START Treaty. (para 116)
11. The inclusion of non strategic nuclear warheads in bilateral US-Russia negotiations will require close consultation among NATO allies. (para 114)
12. NATO nuclear burden sharing should include participation in the development of, as well as the implementation of, NATO's nuclear policy. (para 113)
13. NATO allies must persevere with engaging Russia in nuclear and conventional arms control negotiations . (para 54)

# Introduction

## The crumbling framework of arms control

1. Recent years have seen the demise of the INF Treaty, the absence of an effective mechanism for the control of conventional forces in Europe and the deteriorating relations between NATO and Russia. This has brought increased attention to the contribution that arms control<sup>1</sup> could and should be making to security and stability in the Euro Atlantic area.

2. Looking to arms control as a means of improving relations between NATO and Russia may appear a futile hope when cooperation and dialogue between them is almost non-existent.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the crumbling framework of arms control, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has suggested that arms control continues to be a priority for the Alliance, using the striking phrase that “arms control is in NATO’s DNA”<sup>3</sup>. Since that remark,

**“NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has suggested that arms control continues to be a priority for the Alliance”**

in October 2019, there has been a further erosion of the hard-won arms control regime, with the US preparing to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty<sup>4</sup>. Of the major arms control agreements that underpinned security in the transition from the Cold War and its aftermath, it seems that only the Vienna Document<sup>5</sup> is not at risk; and even this is only partly respected.

3. Stoltenberg’s re-assertion, therefore, of the importance of arms control was as significant as it was welcome. It is also worth noting that it did not come out of the blue. The importance of arms control has a long continuity in NATO’s history. Since the adoption of the Harmel Report on “The Future Tasks of the

1. In this study we shorten the usual term “Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation” to the simpler “arms control”. Though the three concepts are philosophically different and separate, they aim broadly at the same effect, i.e. enhanced security at lower or no levels of armament. Where “arms control” appears in the text it should be understood as referring to the broader concept of “Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation” (ADN) unless specified.

2. This recalls the old observation that when arms control is needed it is not possible, and when possible, it is not needed.

3. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, 23 October 2019, to the High-Level NATO Conference on Arms Control and Disarmament.

4. The Open Skies Treaty allows mutual confidence building reconnaissance flights over the 34 signatory nations, including the US and Russia.

5. The Vienna Document is an agreement between the participating states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe which was intended to implement confidence and security building measures (CSBMs). It was originally adopted on 17 November 1990, building upon and adding to the CSBMs contained in the Document of the Stockholm Conference 1986. The Vienna Document has been revised periodically. The current version dates from 2011.

Alliance” in 1967<sup>6</sup>, NATO has pursued a dual approach to security in which military strength is accompanied by dialogue. This includes arms control measures limiting and controlling the development and deployment of armaments, to maintain defence and deterrence at the lowest possible level of forces consistent with security.

4. At that time, Arms control was seen as the principal, but not the only, instrument of dialogue, a broad concept which embodied the principle of talking to ones’ adversaries through all avenues available. For Harmel, the issue at stake was whether and how to engage in a dialogue with the Soviet Union, recognising that its values and approach to security were problematic. Today NATO faces a similar dilemma with Russia.

5. Significantly, the principles underlying the Harmel approach were not considered redundant with the end of the Cold War and the transformation of the strategic environment. For example, both NATO’s Strategic Concepts in 1991 and 2010 echoed Harmel in defining the implicit need for harmony<sup>7</sup> in the objectives of

defence and arms control. They also committed the Alliance to play its part in reinforcing arms control and promoting the disarmament of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, as well as non-proliferation efforts. For example, NATO and its members have been particularly active in preventing the spread of chemical and biological weapons through support for the Chemical and Biological Conventions.

6. It is in this context that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg suggested that arms control is in NATO’s DNA. He seemed to be suggesting that, despite the increasingly adversarial relationship with Russia since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO has no choice but to continue to work towards arms control solutions. In the light of the Secretary General’s DNA comment, this report assesses the contribution made by NATO in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation; the degree to which arms control is embedded in the Alliance approach to security; and to what extent the objectives of defence and arms control are effectively harmonised.

6. The Report written in 1967 by Pierre Harmel, Belgian Foreign Minister, committed the Alliance to the twin functions of maintaining adequate military strength and political solidarity to deter and defend. On that basis, it was to pursue more stable relations through détente and the relaxation of tensions ; “Military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory but complementary”. It made specific mention of disarmament and practical arms control measures, including the possibility of balanced force reductions. The full Harmel report can be read on the NATO website: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/80830.htm>.

7. “The Allies seek, through arms control and disarmament, to enhance security and stability at the lowest possible level of forces consistent with the requirements of defence. Thus, the Alliance will continue to ensure that defence and arms control and disarmament objectives remain in harmony”. See NATO’s 1991 Strategic Concept, paragraph 26.

## The consequences of COVID-19

7. This report was written when the full consequences of the coronavirus epidemic were not yet fully clear. Its social and economic devastation will be played out not just in the months but in the years to come. Nevertheless, it is already clear how important international cooperation will be in the recovery process. Improvements in security and stability would create the confidence necessary for such cooperation.

8. The scale of damage to national economies will require the substantial re-allocation of resources towards the rebuilding resilience in economic and health systems. This will be costly, but necessary. In this context, the pursuit of arms control and disarmament measures represents an opportunity, above all, to rethink and redirect the current distribution of resources and expenditures away from armaments to the building of civil resilience. For example, NATO's goal of reaching 2% of GDP devoted to defence spending by 2025 now looks not just untenable in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, but actively self-harming.<sup>8</sup>

## The benefits of Arms Control

9. Arms control involves placing limits, constraints and controls on the levels, types and deployments of armaments and armed forces, supported by measures that provide information, verification and transparency. These measures contribute to security and stability by creating transparency and predictability which in turn contributes to confidence and trust.<sup>9</sup> However, these measures can also limit military effectiveness by reducing military flexibility of choice and imposing constraints on the disposition of military forces. Arms control measures thereby contribute to security not only by enhancing the transparency and predictability of the threat but also in constraining, reducing and even removing it. This was the aim of the second arms control track of the 1979 Dual Track decision on Intermediate Nuclear Forces, as discussed later.

10. The approach to arms control needs to be comprehensive and its impact seen not only through the effect and limits on the adversary's potential but also on one's own forces, particularly in reducing armaments and keeping costs and forward

8. For further information on NATO's 2% spending target, see Lunn and Williams, ELN Policy Brief June 2017, "NATO Defence Spending: The Irrationality of 2%" (<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/nato-defence-spending-the-irrationality-of-2/>)

9. For further discussion see the report on "Modernising Conventional Arms Control" by Williams and Lunn for the European Leadership Network (ELN), March 2020.



military deployments to a minimum. An assessment of the impact of arms control measures inevitably constitutes a balance sheet of plus-es or minus-es depending on whose forces are being affected. This requires a clear-sighted assessment of what one analyst has called “The potential advantages of mutual constraint”<sup>10</sup>.

### **Arms Control can help alleviate threat perceptions**

11. Arms control “considerations” should also be assessed for the effect that defence and security developments may have on local, regional, or global stability. Whether a particular weapons system or deployment helps or undermines stability is a difficult judgement because defence and offence are subjective terms.<sup>11</sup> The perception of threat lies in the eye of the beholder and goes beyond the weapon system itself to include its location, configuration and the political context in which it is deployed. The distinction between offensive and defensive systems is further blurred as defensive

systems can facilitate the potential for offensive action, and vice versa. Missile defence provides a good example of differences in perception concerning the effects of offence and defence on stability<sup>12</sup>.

12. By identifying and questioning the likely impact of intended developments, arms control can help shape and alleviate rival threat perceptions.<sup>13</sup> In this sense arms control offers an alternative route to security by reducing or removing the threat or by self-recognition of the destabilising impact of own developments. Security should involve a continuous interchange between the military requirements for deterrence and defence and the arms control measures that could mitigate their impact on stability. When the perception of threat is high, priority will always go to the relative certainty of military preparations, but the potential of arms control should not be forgotten.

13. At the very least, successful arms control or vigorous attempts

10. See “Walking on Broken Glass ; the Challenges of 2020s Arms Control” by Dr Anya Loukianova Fink ELN 12 Feb 2020.

11. In the static situation of the Cold War and in the context of the CFE negotiations it was easy to identify systems as destabilising because of their capacity for surprise attack, their configuration and location. In the more fluid post-Cold War situation everything will depend on subjective perception and so measures should aim at influencing those perceptions.

12. Missile defence has been a permanent problem for the Russians in different guises, particularly the abrogation by the US of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty in 2002. It has reappeared again in the discussions over the violations to the INF Treaty as the systems used in NATO’s Phased Array in Romania and Poland as ballistic missile intercepts can also fire Tomahawk cruise missiles – as the Russians have pointed out.

13. See Williams and Lunn, March 2020, report for ELN on “Modernising Conventional Arms Control”.

to pursue it, by lessening the threat perception of a rival, can reduce the competitive over-armament that results from its absence. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said at the Brussels Forum on 23 June 2020; "... arms control is the best way to prevent a new arms race ... the best way to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, that will make us all safer and reduce the risk of any use of nuclear weapons . So, NATO is a strong supporter of arms control and has been that through the decades."

#### **NATO's role in arms control is significant but indirect**

14. In emphasising a greater role for arms control in Alliance security, not least in the aftermath of Covid-19, this Report recognises that NATO's role is frequently misunderstood. Treaties and agreements are the prerogatives of the member states. NATO's role is therefore significant but indirect. The organisation provides a framework in which Allies consult, and where possible, coordinate common positions on a range of arms control measures. These are then subsequently negotiated by individual members in fora elsewhere, such as the OSCE in Vienna or the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

15. Policies agreed collectively through NATO consultations become part of the overall strategic approach of the Alliance and are reflected in the development of NATO's conventional and nuclear forces, as well as their arms control negotiations. In their consultations, allies cover a broad range of arms control activities each of which are relevant to Alliance security in its broadest interpretation and which enjoy different degrees of support among individual NATO members. This report does not attempt to cover all these activities<sup>14</sup>. Rather the focus is on the role that arms control specifically plays in NATO strategy and its relationship to deterrence and defence

16. In making decisions on security, all Alliance members must balance military requirements against political considerations, including those of arms control. In these decisions, arms control measures contribute their own logic to security and stability in the form of restraint, reduction and transparency. So, what role do these measures play in NATO strategy? Does arms control complement deterrence and defence by reducing or removing the threat? Or does it compete with it by offering an alternative route to security?

14. NATO's achievements in non-proliferation in the fields of chemical and biological weapons, small arms, or demining are impressive. These could be said to be more relevant to the immediate security of allies and wider communities than its work in conventional or nuclear arms control.

## **Security must involve dialogue as well as military strength**

17. In reaction to Russian adversarial behaviour and their military incursions in Ukraine, in 2014, NATO strategy again gives the highest priority to the military capabilities needed for the primary Article Five collective defence mission. Yet, as with Harmel, most NATO governments still recognise that security must involve dialogue as well as military strength and that arms control should have a place in deterrence and defence.

18. Despite this general agreement on the importance of arms control, however, differences inevitably exist among NATO members on the weight and emphasis it should be given in NATO strategy. Public opinion plays a significant part in a government's view of the precise balance to be struck between arms control and military strength. In many NATO countries, public opinion requires reassurance that the pursuit of deterrence and defence is not left unchecked or unconstrained. As the competition and mutual hostility between NATO and Russia translates into ever-increasing military confrontation, public opinion will inevitably ask whether there is an alternative. As the history of NATO shows, in such circumstances, public and informed opinion will progressively turn to arms control.

19. Military requirements and arms control should complement each other: one should not be given exclusive

priority over the other. Inevitably, however, tensions between the two exist, which must be reconciled. As this report notes, the development and implementation of NATO's 1979 INF "Dual Track" decision provides a textbook example of the difficulties in achieving a balanced approach. At the same time, however, as explained later in this report, that decision also provided a vindication of the value of the Harmel doctrine.

20. This report does not cover NATO's engagement and consultations on arms control with its partners. It is known that consultations with partners on arms control have taken place, particularly with the NATO's five partners from Western Europe (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland), but it is not known what form or scope these consultations have taken owing to the confidentiality of their content.

**“As the competition and mutual hostility between NATO and Russia translates into ever-increasing military confrontation, public opinion will inevitably ask whether there is an alternative. As the history of NATO shows, in such circumstances, public and informed opinion will progressively turn to arms control.”**

# The legacy of the Harmel Report – the dual approach lives on

## **The pursuit of military security alone is not enough**

21. NATO's primary role is the security of its members through the commitment to collective deterrence and defence as expressed in the Washington Treaty. During the ideological standoff of the Cold War, fear of nuclear war drove the realisation that military preparations to deter and defend had to be accompanied by the pursuit of dialogue<sup>15</sup>. The Harmel Report effectively codified this dual approach while making clear that the former provided the basis for the latter. The Harmel approach represented a clear, albeit marginal, prioritisation of security over dialogue, an emphasis which still informs the debate on NATO security today.

22. Since the Harmel approach was drafted in the midst of the Cold War, the strategic environment has transformed. However, two specific features persist from that era. First, though lacking the Cold War edge of ideological competition, relations with Russia, the successor to the Soviet Union, have turned adversarial. NATO is again primarily concerned about a pattern of destabilising behaviour from this actor across the Euro Atlantic region.<sup>16</sup> Second, the risk of miscalculation that could provoke conflict and lead eventually to the catastrophic use of nuclear weapons, is again a source of concern<sup>17</sup>.

15. The division of Germany was a primary factor in the search for a relaxation of tensions. However, in the words of US Senator William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "the heart and core of the policy of détente is the lessening of the danger of nuclear war": the hearings of the Committee on Foreign Relations. US Senate on "Détente". Aug 15, 1974. "The control of the nuclear arms race is vital to this objective." Ambassador Averell Harriman to the above hearings.

16. See NATO Secretary General's Annual Report for 2019, on "Relations with Russia".

17. See William J. Perry and Tom Z. Collina, "The Button: The New Nuclear Arms Race and Presidential Power from Truman to Trump", which sets out the lack of checks and balances preventing US presidents from triggering nuclear war. Perry and Collina argue that presidential monopoly on "the button" has reached a new level of danger under President Trump.

# NATO's contribution to arms control

## The individual versus the collective voice

23. An assessment of NATO's contribution to arms control has to separate two dimensions: first, the individual policies of the 30 members of the Alliance who, as sovereign states, are responsible for signing and implementing Treaties and agreements; and second, the role of NATO as the organisation in which those member states consult on, and where possible coordinate, a collective approach to arms control policies of direct relevance to the security interests of the Alliance as a whole. Discussion and consultation between the allies thereby contribute to international awareness and understanding of these issues. For example, those allies with the capacity and expertise to follow the complexities of arms control developments in various international fora share their knowledge and insights with other allies.

24. National voices merge into a single collective policy following agreement within the Alliance. The concrete results of such consultations are contained in the various communiqués and statements issued by NATO, particularly by Foreign Ministers,

supporting a line on arms control. Having consulted on an issue, usually at length, individual allies then feel bound to respect the results of such consultations in their national policies and approaches to arms control. For example, the statement on the INF treaty issued by NATO Foreign Ministers on 4 December 2018 is a typical example of the results of a consultation process. On that occasion, NATO foreign ministers agreed with the US that "Russia's violation of the INF Treaty erodes the foundations of effective arms control and undermines Allied security."

## Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation have varying support and different logics

25. In looking at Alliance involvement and support it is necessary to distinguish between disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Among allies, non-proliferation represents a reaction to a universally recognised threat and enjoys strong backing. Supporting disarmament is more contentious and conditional depending on the specific dimension and circumstances. As for arms control, NATO's involvement extends over a broad range of activities, both nuclear and conventional, reflecting the fact that arms control has the potential to restrict and restrain every aspect of NATO's defence and deterrence policy<sup>18</sup>.

18. The list of negotiations in which NATO members have a direct interest, and the Organisation a supportive role, includes: the negotiations surrounding the CFE Treaty and Vienna Document, the NPT, Open Skies, Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Chemical and Biological, the Ottawa Convention on mine action, the small arms and light weapons (SALW).

26. Each aspect of arms control can make its own individual contribution to security, but inevitably some tend to attract less attention than the high-profile nuclear items. For example, NATO's efforts to reduce or constrain the prevalence of small arms and light weapons in zones of conflict are virtually unknown; nevertheless, they are highly important.

27. As noted above, NATO members make their own decisions on security policies, including on arms control treaties and agreements, according to their national interests. Nevertheless, in developing their national assessments and policies, there is an unstated assumption, built in to the responsibilities of NATO membership, that members take full account of the commitments that they have made through consultations within NATO. It is, therefore, a two-way process: the Allies make NATO policy, and NATO policy is reflected in national positions. In short, individual positions become collective NATO policy after consultation and coordination within the NATO framework and achieve the NATO imprimatur, or endorsement, which is significant in terms of signalling a NATO agreed position.

**NATO's consultation process is both formal and informal**

28. As NATO decisions are taken by consensus, much of its work is devoted to the process of consultation.

19. This is discussed later in this report, in paragraphs 90 and 91.

**“It is therefore a two way process: the Allies make NATO policy and NATO policy is reflected in national positions.”**

The term “consultation” covers a wide range of communication and exchanges between allies. On one end of the scale, it covers as simple a procedure as one ally providing, usually in committee format, information to the others on a security subject which should be interesting from an Alliance perspective: this allows other allies to ask questions and add additional information. At the other end of the scale, it can involve a series of open-ended discussions leading to a major policy decision or a statement on behalf of the Alliance as a whole. Under Article 4 of the NATO treaty, consultation is a precondition for triggering Article 5 of the Treaty, collective defence.

29. As this Report highlights, while the principle of consultation is important, it is the content and quality of that consultation which really count. This is particularly true in current circumstances in the consultation between the US and its NATO allies on nuclear policy and arms control.<sup>19</sup>

30. Compared with NATO's efforts to build collective defence and deterrence, which is the cumulative result of a myriad of bodies within

the Alliance, consultations on arms control, disarmament and non proliferation are promoted by several specialised NATO bodies. For example, NATO has a dedicated Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Committee. NATO's policy on conventional arms control and confidence and security-building measures is coordinated in the High-Level Task Force on Conventional Arms Control. The implementation and verification of arms control agreements fall under the purview of the Verification Coordinating Committee (VCC). Interestingly, there is no NATO committee dedicated to nuclear arms control. Consultations on this subject are so sensitive that they are elevated to the level of the Deputy Ambassadors Committee or even to the North Atlantic Council itself, as they were for the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty.<sup>20</sup>

31. Consultations frequently involve endless "give and take" exchanges in the various committees between national representatives under instruction from their national capitals<sup>21</sup> until a consensus is achieved. It is worth noting the significant depth and breadth of the

consultation process, which extends from the formal committee process at different levels, and the bilateral contacts, to the daily contacts including the coffee shop, and the very significant yet informal, smaller groupings within the headquarters brought together by common or regional interest<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, as an influence on NATO policy, one should not underestimate the effect of "Track Two" deliberations outside the NATO building which comprise a mix of officials, academics, and media in informal settings that encourage free-flowing and open discussion and debate which might not otherwise be possible in the more formal NATO setting.

### **Attitudes on arms control within NATO vary widely**

32. As noted earlier, attitudes vary considerably among the 30 members on the significance that arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation should play within NATO's overall strategy. For obvious reasons there is widespread support for non-proliferation. However, attitudes towards arms control and

20. NATO's organisational arrangements are discussed further in paragraph 56. Detailed information can be found on the NATO website at [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

21. Consultation within NATO takes place at multiple levels from the cafeteria upwards to the committee meetings, the weekly consultations of NATO Ambassadors (the NAC), to the Ministerial and Summits.

22. Examples are the Visegrad group; the three nuclear powers; the same 3 plus Germany known as the Quad; countries who prioritise arms control known in the building as "the usual suspects" and referred to somewhat unkindly by one Baltic Ambassador at NATO as "those who believe peace will break out tomorrow" This view typifies the basic differences of approach in the NATO HQ, and which in many ways is at the heart of the debate on the respective roles of military and arms control in Alliance security policy.

disarmament are more nuanced with more adherents to the benefits of the former than the latter. Even those most sceptical of arms control need to be aware of public sentiment in favour of arms control in their societies. The admission of central and eastern European members to NATO has probably tipped the balance towards greater scepticism over the value of dialogue and arms control, as opposed to the Cold War. However, since new members rely on other, more defence capable, members for their security, they have to accept that the price to pay for collective defence is a collective approach to security, including dialogue and arms control.

### **Arms control – an invitation to Russian mischief?**

33. It follows that, for some members, NATO is not the appropriate forum for discussion of arms control; they prefer to focus on NATO's primary mission of deterrence and defence<sup>23</sup>. For these members, arms control is accepted as an occasional necessity but is seen as inviting Russian mischief. Other allies recognise the unambiguous benefits that arms control brings to security but note the absence of a partner (Russia) with whom to negotiate and

who is willing to accept the essential arms control principle of reciprocity. Nevertheless, some countries, particularly those long-standing allies in central and northern Europe<sup>24</sup>, insist that public support for deterrence and defence requires that modernisation decisions are accompanied by efforts for arms control. As one senior Dutch official commented, "there is always a need to balance deterrence with a reference to arms control as the second pillar of security"<sup>25</sup>.

34. Allied differences are often absorbed or accommodated within the consensus-building process in NATO to achieve a common NATO position. Nevertheless, these underlying differences can linger in terms of the degree of enthusiasm or commitment to the agreed policy. Thus, as would be expected for a consensus-based organisation, NATO declarations inevitably contain opaque language capable of different and sometimes contradictory interpretations.

**“there is always a need to balance deterrence with a reference to arms control as the second pillar of security”.**

23. France has never been happy with references to arms control in NATO business. This is in line with France's general approach of keeping NATO focused on its primary mission of collective defence. France initially took a negative approach to the Harmel exercise ; this was based on the wish of President de Gaulle to limit the role of the Alliance in the pursuit of détente.

24. In the experience of the authors, those allies who traditionally argue for a greater role for dialogue and arms control are Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordic states and Canada.

25. Interviews with authors.



# The effect of public opinion

## Allies would prefer nuclear issues to remain dormant

35. The question of public opinion is fundamental to Alliance thinking and policy. It is difficult to generalise about public opinion on NATO's arms control policies in member states as this varies according to the countries geographic location, vulnerability, historical experience and cultural factors. It is safe to assert that in most NATO member states – even the more recent members who tend to be robust on security issues - the mention of nuclear weapons raises public concerns.<sup>26</sup>

36. Discussion on NATO's nuclear capability is consequently an issue that most members would prefer to remain dormant.<sup>27</sup> This sensitivity to negative public opinion poses a problem for some in the nuclear community who believe the solution to public antipathy lies in education on the benefits of nuclear deterrence through greater openness and transparency. In most Alliance countries public opinion supports the principle of arms control

as a constraining hand to balance military preparations, improve transparency and lower expenditures.

**“Discussion on NATO's nuclear capability is consequently an issue that most members would prefer remain dormant”**

26. A survey in 18 NATO and non-NATO countries across the globe undertaken by IPSOS-MORI dated January 2020 on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that 80% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that “the existence of nuclear weapons is a threat to humanity.” See ICRC report “Millennials on War”, <https://www.icrc.org/en/millennials-on-war>

27. A Nordic NATO Ambassador commented “the nuclear issue is the sleeping dog that is best left alone; nuclear weapons are only a problem when someone starts talking of getting rid of them”. Interviews with the authors.

## Consultation drives policy

### **NATO does not impose: allies comply**

37. The degree of NATO involvement, or what could be termed NATO's "role" in arms control, is a function of the consultation process. While NATO has no direct input to national policies, the emergence of an agreed NATO approach and the NATO "stamp of authority" can influence not only these decisions but also wider discussions on specific aspects of arms control. This includes the non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), providing significant reinforcing support to the broader pursuit of their objectives.

38. Despite the common policy created among NATO allies through consultation, allies have their individual interpretations, and may not see themselves bound by the letter to NATO agreements. Their positions can change when confronted by the reality of different positions in a wider negotiating forum such as the OSCE, which includes not only Russia but other non-members of NATO who may be sympathetic to curbing NATO–Russia military build-ups by means of arms control. Nevertheless, should

national positions stray or be opposed radically to the one agreed in prior consultations at NATO, allies may find themselves under considerable pressure, not least from the US, to adopt a more NATO compliant line.

### **All allies are equal, but some ...**

39. As the ultimate guarantor of allied security, the US brings by far the most of any ally in terms of nuclear and conventional forces. In arms control generally, it has a strong but not overriding voice. It participates fully in NATO consultations and is bound by NATO policies as is any other ally. Nevertheless, in the realm of strategic nuclear forces, the US voice dominates; although in negotiations involving NATO nuclear weapons the US position may be nuanced by consultation with the allies.

40. The vagaries of the US inter-agency process in Washington and the increasingly critical stance taken to NATO by recent US administrations result in the voice of other allies not being heard so clearly in Washington as before. The US delegation to NATO often has to remind their authorities in the US administration of the policies that the US has agreed to in NATO<sup>28</sup>.

28. US NATO official. Interview with the authors.

## **NATO's commitment to arms control is supportive, but not over-enthusiastic**

41. Irrespective of NATO's prioritisation of collective defence, there is a rhetorical commitment at the highest level to see arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation as an integral part of Alliance security policy<sup>29</sup>. In the words of former NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller, "they are part of the continuum of security and defence"<sup>30</sup>. The language in the 2010 Strategic Concept and the subsequent "Defence and Deterrence Posture Review" (DDPR) is more muted on the significance or the place of arms control. The Concept only commits NATO to playing its part in reinforcing arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation<sup>31</sup>; the DDPR limits itself to acknowledging the important role played by arms control in the achievement of Alliance security objectives. These variations demonstrate that NATO's commitment is not a constant ; instead, it ebbs and flows.

42. References to arms control in official statements are carefully crafted

to reflect the differing views among the members on the emphasis to be attributed to different aspects of the arms control trio. The language used is therefore often supportive, but not overenthusiastic. There is no mention of arms control being "essential" or "integral" to security. Similarly, the language from the last four NATO Summits reflects a firm reliance on the military strength with only a passing nod to arms control. References to the generic expression "Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation" as a collective term are modest - barely three lines among over 100 paragraphs for each NATO Summit declaration. There is general support for non-proliferation policies but the role and place of arms control as such in Alliance strategy is more contentious and conditional<sup>32</sup>.

43. As a result of Russian activities, particularly in Ukraine, and the vulnerability concerns of NATO's northern members, the bulk of the measures adopted during the three transformational NATO Summits of Wales (2014), Warsaw (2016) and Brussels (2018) are

29. "Consistent with these principles, Allied Heads of State and Government have agreed that arms control is an integral part of the Alliance's security policy." The Alliance's Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament 29 May 1989 updated 26 August 2010

30. Rose Gottemoeller, former NATO Deputy Secretary General, 10 September 2019, Oslo University presentation on "NATO nuclear policy in a post-INF world".

31. "We will continue to play our part in reinforcing arms control and in promoting disarmament of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, as well as non-proliferation efforts" Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Lisbon November 19-20 2010.

32. The qualifying terms used to describe the role of arms control in NATO strategy in official documents include: Essential, important, central, key. These are all static descriptors, not activators, which have been constant for decades.

## “It is clear that the active pursuit of arms control has slipped in NATO’s priorities”

devoted to measures aimed at strengthening deterrence and defence. By comparison, arms control considerations appear to have taken a back seat. It is clear that the active pursuit of arms control has slipped in NATO’s priorities. This is a mistake; it should be upgraded and elevated into its proper position partnering military strength as a means of achieving security at the lowest possible level of armament.

### **Arms control is low on the list of the military’s priorities**

44. It is understandable that military strength and preparedness retain primary position in NATO strategy as the basis for security. It is not so understandable that arms control seems to come so low on the priority list of NATO’s military. In 2019, NATO endorsed a new Military Strategy (a classified document) developed by NATO’s Military Authorities. “It is the first NATO military strategy

in decades,” General Dunford, then Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff said at the Brookings Institution in May 2019<sup>33</sup>. He added that “It clearly articulates the challenges that confront NATO and it provides the framework for the various plans that will be in place if deterrence fails.” It seems that NATO’s new Military Strategy is designed, as it should, to maintain the credibility of NATO’s military options – but no public statement on the purpose or content of the new Military Strategy mentions arms control.

45. This seems to suggest that NATO’s military (as opposed to the civilian defence planning structures in the political side of the NATO HQ), while evidently constrained by any arms control regime that may be agreed, does not regard itself obliged to think creatively about the potential of arms control for achieving security at lower levels of armament. This contrasts with the experience of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) in the late 1980s when NATO’s military structure actively and creatively contributed to ideas and proposals for conventional arms control<sup>34</sup>. Evidently, arms control is not so much part of the DNA of NATO’s military command structures as it is of the political side of the house.

33. See <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/05/dunford-first-nato-strategy-okd-in-decades/>

34. The authors were involved closely in NATO discussions in the preparations for the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, particularly the definitions of the capabilities to be included. NATO’s International Military Staff contributed innovative ideas on conventional arms control in a series of proposals which were at times in advance of the civilian policy makers.

NATO's military authorities should be charged with actively searching for arms control solutions for improving security, to moderate the effects of the imbalanced pursuit of military strength.

### **Can arms control offer a different route to security?**

46. So, the question is this; despite NATO's current focus on ensuring the credibility of its conventional and nuclear forces, can arms control contribute to defence by constraining and reducing the potential threat, thereby offering a different route to security?

47. The problem is that deterrence and arms control do not always sit easily together; developments in one often undercut developments in the other. NATO policies have tried to reconcile the two, particularly in response to public opinion. The traditional tendency has been to give priority to the certainty of military strength and to balance this with a declaratory reference to the need for arms control. The problem is that, for some time, these references have lacked any vigour and are losing credibility.

48. The role of arms control in NATO strategy, its relationship to

modernisation, and the pressure of public opinion will continue to pose questions for Alliance members. The endorsement of arms control should inform all areas of NATO's planning for nuclear and conventional forces and negotiations. In the nuclear field, the initiative is always with the US, for obvious reasons.<sup>35</sup> But that does not preclude NATO, as a whole, from recognising and acting on the potential of arms control to achieve security at the lowest possible level of armaments, even in the nuclear sphere. The policies which result from the NATO consultation process, as this report illustrates, represent a continuous tussle between the competing demands of deterrence and defence and those of arms control. In today's environment, defence prevails over arms control.

**“...can arms control contribute to defence by constraining and reducing the potential threat , thereby offering a different route to security?”**

35. For the moment it can be assumed that France and the UK, having what they consider to be independent and minimal nuclear deterrents, will resist efforts to include their nuclear forces in arms control. Non-US NATO allies particularly those participating in NATO's nuclear posture can make their views known on nuclear policy but the initiative for action lies with the US.

# Arms control begins at home

## Arms Controllers versus Defence Planners

49. In decisions on national security, NATO members must cope with a different range of challenges and pressures, both external and domestic. It is a constant challenge, common to all, to ensure that military planning and arms control considerations take full account of each other. In many countries, the integration of military planning with broader policy considerations, including arms control, is not helped by the common compartmentalisation of the issues between Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs or Treasuries. Each country handles the integration of defence planning and arms control in its own way and with different degrees of success.<sup>36</sup>

50. Integration is an elusive term which can indicate different levels of cooperation or “jointness”, ranging from arms controllers and force planners working physically together in the same location, to having a conceptual policy of integration. In the latter, controllers and planners work separately for their own purposes but consult from “a distance” to

“Simply put defence and arms control are not seen as being two sides of the same security coin.”

identify opportunities for trade-offs. Unfortunately, both at NATO and in many allied capitals, defence planners and arms controllers work independently within their own organisational silos. As a result, opportunities for integration or trade-offs are often missed.

51. The problem of successfully integrating defence planning and arms control is that their relationship derives initially from the basic interpretation of their distinctive contributions to security policy. Despite the formal rhetoric, their respective contributions to security are not seen as equal and this relationship is reflected in different ways – in priorities, in organisations, but also in identification by function - literally “arms controllers” versus “hard hats” or “warriors” versus “peaceniks”. Simply put, defence and arms control are not seen as being two sides of the same security coin. This separation is part of the ethos that permeates the debate between arms control and defence.

36. The US created the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in 1961 to ensure that arms control was fully integrated into the conduct of US national security policy. It was abolished in 1999 and its functions merged into the Department of State. In 1975 Congress mandated the Administration to provide arms control impact statements to the Congress with requests for authorisation or appropriation for certain defence and nuclear programs. These are examples of trying to build and integrate arms control into the system.

## The problem with Russia

52. To be effective arms control needs reciprocity<sup>37</sup>. In today's context, this raises the issue of Russian attitudes and actions. For some observers, these represent the major impediment to NATO efforts and ambitions in arms control. This is a subject that merits a different study. Here it is enough to note that, in the opinion of the authors, the Russian record is mixed. In negotiations on strategic and intermediate range nuclear forces, the Russians have been tough but correct, also concerning implementation and verification. That record has been undermined by the suggested violation of the INF Treaty which led to its abrogation.

53. Conversely, Russian analysts point to the US abrogation of the ABM treaty, and more recent developments, as also undermining the trust needed for arms control. Without access to information, which is kept secret on both sides, it is impossible to judge the truth in these claims and counter-claims. It is also impossible to judge whether, what seems to an outside observer like a minor, technical or rectifiable breach of an arms control Treaty, warrants its complete nullification.

54. The “back and forth” on the responsibility for the respect (or lack of it) for arms control obligations is inevitable. But such arguments are fundamental to the arms control regime. Disputes about compliance can only be resolved through perseverance and engagement, for which arms control agreements and treaties provide an appropriate and practical framework. Ironically, the discussion of disagreements and doubts about compliance contribute to the benefits of arms control; only by discussing differences in a recognised and established Treaty resolution mechanism, which arms control treaties invariably provide for, can issues be resolved or the doubts about non-compliance identified. As Winston Churchill is thought to have said, “Jaw-jaw is better than war-war”!

**“For some observers, [Russian actions] represent the major impediment to NATO’s efforts and ambitions in arms control.”**

37. “The key to success is a firm and shared commitment to verifiability and reciprocity. The value of arms control and non -proliferation dissipates if one party abandons that commitment,” quote by former NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs 12 Sept 2019 in a presentation outlining the prospects and problems of what she termed a “new phase in arms control”.

# Deterrence, defence and arms control

## **NATO should balance military requirements with the pursuit of arms control**

55. The longstanding endorsement by Alliance members that arms control is an integral part of the strategy of deterrence and defence suggests that arms control considerations should be reflected in the development of NATO's conventional and nuclear forces. In theory, though challenging in practice, Alliance members should strive to balance the military requirements of its strategy with the pursuit of arms control. The need for balance has been constant. Just as NATO was emerging from the Cold War and adjusting itself to a very different strategic environment, NATO's New Strategic Concept in 1991 indicated that the Alliance would continue "to ensure that defence and arms control and disarmament objectives remain in harmony"<sup>38</sup>.

**"Alliance members should strive to balance the military requirements of its strategy with the pursuit of arms control"**

56. Given that the Alliance has always considered arms control as an inherent part of its security spectrum, is there any evidence that NATO gives due regard to harmonising the objectives of deterrence, defence, and arms control? Examples from the Cold War, as discussed later, show that when arms control is in serious and realistic prospect, NATO and its member states do make the effort to harmonise the differing imperatives of collective defence and arms control. But at other times, in their own self-perpetuating worlds, defence planners and military commands get on with their main and primary business of defending, untroubled by thoughts of arms control: arms control has to be imposed by circumstances, either external (the international and security environment) or internal (political and public opinion).

## **The bias against arms control is also structural**

57. The relative neglect of arms control is reflected structurally and organisationally. Within NATO, deterrence and defence comprises a well-entrenched and resourced constituency. This is supported through a substantial defence planning bureaucracy and associated NATO commands, in addition to the nuclear planning community. Arms control has no such organised and

38. NATO Strategic Concept 1991, paragraph 26.



coherent constituency to argue its corner. Instead, arms control issues can be raised ad hoc in a variety of consultation fora from the North Atlantic Council downwards. These include the various arms control issues that members bring to the table, which are handled by the “Arms Control, Disarmament and WMD Non-Proliferation Centre” (ACDC). This is, in effect, an embedded directorate within the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division (PASP), which is responsible for the broad range of high profile political subjects confronting the Alliance.<sup>39</sup>

58. Arms control is handled by a relatively small group of people compared with the substantial numbers involved with ensuring the effectiveness of deterrence and defence. The “arms controllers” punch well above their weight in terms of their activities in energetically promoting the benefits of arms control. However, the current structure does not convey the sense of interest and priority to match the resolve and determination of official NATO declarations in favour of arms control. Its internal structure should indicate a more prominent role

for disarmament and arms control in Alliance considerations recommended in Harmel discussions<sup>40</sup>.

59. The fragmentary nature of the Alliance’s approach to arms control tends to obscure some very real, but understated, NATO achievements. As noted earlier, arms control covers a broad range of activities which do not always attract attention<sup>41</sup>. Much of this work lacks profile yet is probably of more immediate relevance to everyday security than the more high-profile items. Much more can be achieved by upgrading the role that arms control plays in NATO’s organisation and priorities.

**“The fragmentary nature of the Alliance’s approach to arms control tends to obscure some very real, but understated, NATO achievements”**

39. The NATO-Russia Council can play a role in this field.

40. It is worth noting that, of the 4 reports that contributed to the Harmel Report, the report of sub-group 3 by Mr Foy D Kohler included a recommendation that NATO should strengthen its arms control machinery by creating a separate Arms Control and Disarmament Committee supported by an expert staff section within the IS. See the Harmel report.

41. NATO manages programmes dealing with small arms and light weapons (SALW), land mine destruction and related projects funded through the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Trust Funds working in a variety of countries, many in conflict zones. These result in the elimination of an enormous amount of ordinance, making NATO in the words of one official “the leading demilitarisation organisation in the world”.

### **Arms control should be significantly strengthened within the NATO structures**

60. NATO is the repository of accrued Alliance wisdom in the field of collective defence, demonstrating remarkable efficiency over the years in building a formidable defence out of the disparate contributions of its members. As a result, Allied military capability is greater than the sum of its parts. NATO consequently has a special responsibility to demonstrate equal efficiency in promoting the benefits of arms control and in avoiding competitive over-armament.

61. This report contends that current arrangements for the pursuit of arms control within NATO are wholly inadequate. NATO's policy statements from Harmel to the present indicates that dialogue, with arms control as a major element within it, constitutes an essential and integral element in NATO's approach to security. If this is so, the organisation should better reflect this importance in its organisation. This would mean elevating the arms control directorate at NATO into a Division, with its own Assistant Secretary General with the task of participating equally and fully in NATO's defence planning process. It would also mean tasking NATO's militaries with the duty to consider proposed innovative arms control solutions as a means of achieving security at the lowest possible level of armament.

# Non-proliferation

## **NATO has a good track record in promoting non-proliferation**

62. There is general support and enthusiasm for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the NATO framework is used for consultation. The NATO statement of 5 March 2020, which emphasises that there is no alternative to the NPT, was an example of consultation and coordination in advance of the review conference. This was scheduled to start in New York on 27 April 2020 (as a result of the COVID pandemic, the review conference has been postponed, possibly until early 2021). However, in the context of the role of NATO in the NPT, it is important to note that while US leadership has been key to the success of the NPT in the past, senior Trump officials claim that the conclusions of previous review conferences no longer apply. They downplay the urgency of today's nuclear risks and argue that the "environment" is not right for progress in disarmament because the US' strategic competitors (Russia and China) have modernised their nuclear arsenals, whereas the US has not. In

**"NATO has a good track record in promoting non-proliferation"**

any case, they argue, limits on nuclear arsenals are not verifiable and liable to cheating.<sup>42</sup>

63. NATO has a good track record in promoting non-proliferation. It has worked actively to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) through the creation of a WMD Centre at NATO in 1997. In addition the role played by existing committees, the NAC was tasked to create a new consultation forum. The new special advisory committee on arms control<sup>43</sup> was agreed after a long internal struggle which demonstrated the different national views towards NATO's competence and role in this field. Its function was to provide advice on NATO–Russia transparency and to constitute a forum for consultation on bilateral negotiations.<sup>44</sup>

42. See Arms Control Today April 8, 2020.

43. The Special Advisory and Consultative Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Committee (ACDN). Oliver Meier, Arms Control Today, 2013, "NATO agrees on new arms control body".

44. For discussion of the problems facing the creation and functioning of this committee see Oliver Meier and Simon Lunn. Arms Control Today 2014, "Trapped: NATO and Russia and the Problems of Tactical Nuclear Weapons".

# Conventional forces

## **The NATO Defence Planning Process is very effective over time**

64. The principal area of focus for the defence planning process<sup>45</sup> within NATO is the setting and monitoring of national capability targets. NATO's "guiding hand" has a distinctly light touch and national considerations are taken into account, to the extent that targets are adjusted to national constraints and limitations. NATO does not set unreasonable targets: it sets "reasonable challenges" to form a coherent whole out of otherwise distinct national efforts. The effect of the planning process is evident over time: NATO achieves a higher degree of coherence in collective defence than would be the case if allies were left to their own devices.

## **Arms control is given little prominence in the Defence Planning Process**

65. It is unclear at what point arms control considerations are raised in the collective defence planning process. It must be assumed that nations take account of the potential

contribution of arms control in their national deliberations – yet this is difficult to confirm. For the purposes of this report it is more important to ask at what stage in the examination and endorsement of the national contributions, which constitutes NATO's collective force posture, arms control considerations are given a hearing. Given the nature of the defence planning process, with its emphasis on the attainment of national capability targets, it is reasonable to assume that, in the move from national to collective defence planning, arms control slips from view. As one former NATO force planner conceded when asked what part does arms control play in NATO's defence planning, "not much"<sup>46</sup>. Arms control considerations and the potential for contributing to security should be fully integrated into the Defence Planning process.

## **When arms control was important**

66. The maintenance of credible armed forces to support NATO strategy has always been the centrepiece of the Alliance. During the Cold War, the imbalance in conventional forces and the Warsaw Pact's capacity for

45. NATO's Force Planning System has undergone changes since the Cold War to reflect the broadening of NATO's military role. During the Cold War, its sole purpose was to build up and fill the gaps in NATO's collective defence posture by addressing force goals (i.e. requirements for force improvements) to participants in NATO's integrated military structure. In recent times, the process, which has been adjusted but remains essentially the same, has been renamed the "Defence Planning Process". This was done in recognition of the broader range of capabilities that NATO encourages its members to develop. In this "Defence planning" and "force planning" are interchangeable terms.

46. Interview with the authors.

surprise attacks and large-scale offensive action constituted the driving force behind NATO defence planning. This primarily (but not exclusively) meant US pressure to improve NATO's conventional posture in the form of periodic special initiatives<sup>47</sup> with limited scope for conventional arms control.

67. Over time there was also gradual recognition that arms control might improve the situation. Negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) opened in Vienna 30 October 1973. A variety of factors lay behind the Western decision to proceed with MBFR, including the wish to counter Soviet pressure for a European security conference and Congressional pressure for unilateral US troop reductions. However, the need to improve the balance of forces was certainly a prime motive. Regardless, the negotiations made little progress over 16 years.

68. The arrival of Gorbachev<sup>48</sup> brought the breakthrough. He injected the flexibility needed to achieve substantial reductions under the CFE Treaty and the creation of a verification arms control regime which promised a stable framework of transparency and predictability. While representing

two different and separate sides of the security equation, defence and arms control were, at last, moving into alignment. Arms control was, it seemed, making life easier for NATO force planners.

69. Gorbachev's influence, the signature of the INF Treaty in 1987, and the prospect of conventional force negotiations saw an upsurge of enthusiasm for arms control. Combined with criticism from military voices that the INF Treaty undercut NATO strategy by limiting NATO's nuclear options, this convinced NATO planners that it was imperative to ensure that NATO defence planning and arms control work together in close synchronisation.

70. As a sign of this recognition, the week-long annual Defence Planning Symposium for the Alliance's defence planning community was devoted in 1988 to "Defence Planning in an Era of Arms Control and Disarmament". This assembled force planners from Alliance capitals – in effect the Alliance defence planning community - to discuss the likely consequences of arms control on NATO's strategy of flexible response. Understandably, the focus was on how defence planning should be aware of arms control in maintaining the credibility of the

47. For example, President Carter's Long Term Defence Program in the 1970s or the US-inspired Conventional Defence Improvements Initiative of the 80's. Both focussed exclusively on improving NATO's conventional forces and both were adopted with no reference to arms control considerations.

48. 7th December 1988 General Secretary Gorbachev made his presentation at the United Nations concerning the Soviet Union's determination to make unilateral force reductions.

strategy. The onus was always on defence to be aware of arms control, never the other way around.

### **NATO's integrated concept for arms control and defence planning**

71. The complex and interrelated problems occurring from arms control and the new political environment persuaded NATO Ministers to instruct the NAC to develop "a Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament". This was adopted in May 1989<sup>49</sup>. The Concept was drafted during the early stages of the post-Cold War thaw and reflects a strategic situation already changing beyond recognition. Nevertheless, its emphasis on the importance of defence planning and arms control working together remains relevant, but unfortunately non-operational.

72. The concept emphasised that defence policy and arms control should be complementary and interactive within an integrated approach. This obviously makes sense. However, as the concept itself noted, the two disciplines are frequently working from different sheets of music in terms of dynamics, circumstances, political pressures and threat analysis. This leaves room for different demands, pressures and conflicting priorities which inevitably hamper the achievement of an integrated approach. In view of the changed

strategic situation and the challenges facing the Alliance, the development of an updated comprehensive concept is long overdue to guide and re-prioritise NATO's approach to arms control.

### **Arms control and defence planning remain as distant as ever**

73. It would seem the two worlds of arms control and defence planning remain distant. While they aim for the same goal the means to reach that goal are very different and sometimes conflicting. It does not appear that, in the planning of NATO's conventional forces, arms control considerations are taken into account in any systemic organisational way but rather by lip service through rhetorical declarations. At what stage, for example, during the discussions on NATO's plans for bases and deployments in the Baltic States and Poland were arms control considerations raised? It is difficult to believe, but unfortunately conceivable, that in the development of NATO's deployment and reinforcement plans to Eastern Europe, no one raised the possible consequences of the deployments on local and regional stability, or the possibility of proposing additional confidence and security-building measures. This downgrading of arms control in relation to defence planning is an inevitable, but short-sighted, fall-out from Russia's actions in Ukraine and Crimea.

49. The Alliance's "Comprehensive Concept of Arms Control and Disarmament" adopted by Heads of State and Government. 29 May 1989.

# Conventional arms control

## Europe needs arms control for regional pockets of instability

74. It follows from the previous discussion that, during the last stages of the Cold War, arms control made a substantial contribution to stability in Europe through the CFE Treaty. However, the Treaty is almost defunct and effectively marking time.<sup>50</sup> In today's Europe it is difficult to see adversarial conflict between states that would involve the use of armed forces on the scale that CFE had to address. Europe has a number of regional and local pockets of instability through unresolved and simmering conflicts, such as Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh, which point to the inadequacy of the current regulatory framework. And there are countries that remain nervous about their neighbours. In their nature, these problem areas require local or regional solutions designed to improve transparency and military predictability.

## The importance of the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

75. The OSCE remains the crucial forum, with a focus on bringing its 57 members in to inclusive dialogue to develop a comprehensive approach to security with a focus on military security, resolving past conflicts and promoting human security. For the moment, hope must reside in a revised Vienna Document as the only surviving arms control instrument which provides a degree of transparency on military forces and important thresholds on large-scale military activities. In the authors' opinion, there is great scope for lowering the thresholds and ceilings constraining military activities further than OSCE participants appear willing to go. For instance, a moratorium on military exercises in the Baltic area could be a first step in easing tensions there<sup>51</sup>. Equally, as tensions grow in the Black Sea and eastern Mediterranean there is also scope, at least, for a dialogue on what constitutes unacceptable military behaviour in these increasingly dangerous flashpoints.

50. Russia suspended its obligations in 2007. NATO members did likewise with Russia. According to a NATO official, NATO members are "implementing our full obligations with CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty) with all other CFE parties but Russia, including the data exchange, inspections etc Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are all non-allies fully implementing as well".

51. For ideas for updating the Vienna Document for contemporary circumstances, see Williams and Lunn, ELN policy brief, March 2020, "Modernising Conventional Arms Control" (<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/modernising-conventional-arms-control-an-urgent-imperative/>)

76. In conventional arms control, the Alliance assumed a coordinating role in both negotiations and implementation of the CFE Treaty. NATO's High-Level Task Force (HLTF) was created to ensure that NATO could exercise a specific coordinating role in the CFE negotiations. This was done in order to preserve Alliance unity and the coherence of NATO's collective defence.<sup>52</sup>

77. The HLTF exists today as NATO's committee for coordinating policy on conventional arms control and confidence and security-building measures. It is worth remembering that, whatever the framework for discussing and negotiating the control and limits of conventional forces, NATO members will insist on speaking with one voice on any issue related to collective defence and deterrence. For some members, the insistence on a collective voice is precisely to ensure that arms control considerations do not diverge from defence planning.

### **The prospects for conventional arms control are bleak**

78. The prospects for progress in conventional arms control are currently bleak: not least because Russian unwillingness to engage shows no sign of improving. Nevertheless, the development of a framework

for controlling and constraining conventional armed forces remains an essential foundation for security and stability in Europe. NATO's collective voice must play a bigger role in pursuing the creation of this framework. On the NATO side, the US continues apace to withdraw from arms control treaties which were once considered cornerstones of European security, citing irregularities or contraventions on the part of Russia or other global circumstances. Such contraventions have to be balanced against the damage done by the dismantling of a tried and trusted framework of transparency and constraint. In such a technical area, violations or infringements of treaties may not be so clear cut as first appear: it is worth "going the extra mile" in trying to understand and resolve them.

79. The latest casualty is the Open Skies Treaty, whose future is also threatened<sup>53</sup>. The Treaty was signed in 1989, as a confidence-building measure to promote greater transparency by permitting overflights of military installations, forces and activities. It is an important symbol of cooperation and predictability. The United States has informed its NATO allies of its intention to withdraw from the Treaty in November 2020. However, it has done so without what would be normally deemed full and appropriate

52. The HLTF involved unusual reporting mechanism to Vienna via national delegations rather than the NAC see "Conventional Arms Control in the Euro Atlantic Region" by Simon Lunn ELN policy brief. Oct 2013.

53. See "Is this the end of the Open Skies Treaty?" Steven Pifer , Brookings Institute March 9, 2020.



consultation, considering the evident support and longevity of the Treaty<sup>54</sup>. There have also been reports that suggest that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) may be under threat. In a crisis, the absence of so many familiar arms control frameworks could be fatal.

80. As noted earlier, the Vienna Document seems one of the few arms control agreements not under threat. In this context, this document assumes even greater importance. It is imperative to strengthen and improve its confidence-building and transparency measures.

54. See the European Leadership Network's joint group statement on saving the Open Skies Treaty 12 March 2020.

# Nuclear forces

## European participation in NATO's nuclear posture

81. Because of their devastating and cataclysmic effects, nuclear weapons have always been a sensitive element of NATO strategy, particularly in terms of public opinion. Dependence on the US nuclear guarantee, the stationing in Europe of American nuclear warheads, and the participation of several Allies in NATO's nuclear posture through dual capable aircraft (DCA) have contributed to periodic public questioning of NATO's nuclear strategy. During such re-examinations, pursuits of modernisation on the one hand and arms control on the other have inevitably locked horns.

82. During the Cold War, US nuclear warheads for use on "tactical" delivery systems were deployed to Europe to compensate for NATO's conventional inferiority. The United States consulted with its allies on the doctrines, policies and deployments for these systems through NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) and later the High-Level Group<sup>55</sup>. As the owner of the nuclear warheads, the United States

**"Because of their devastating and cataclysmic effects, nuclear weapons have always been a sensitive element of NATO strategy, particularly in terms of public opinion".**

has traditionally taken the lead in discussions of NATO's nuclear posture with the allies largely "on receive". However, in discussions on the highly sensitive question of the development of guidelines for the employment of NATO's nuclear posture, the Allies participated actively<sup>56</sup>.

83. General consultations were central to the emergence, in 1967, of NATO's strategy of Flexible Response which accommodated conflicting views among the Allies on the circumstances under which nuclear weapons should be used.<sup>57</sup> These deep-rooted differences were absorbed by leaving the terms of employment as ambiguous as possible, best summarised as "as soon as necessary, as late as possible".<sup>58</sup>

55. The Nuclear Planning Group meets once or twice a year, minus France, at the level of Defence Ministers or more regularly Ambassadors. It is supported by the NPG staff group which comprises representatives from the national delegations at NATO, meets regularly and is chaired by the Director of the Nuclear Directorate on the International Staff who is always an American. The HLG comprises senior officials from national capitals, is chaired by an American and meets at the discretion of the chair.

56. Known as "The provisional political guidelines for the initial defensive tactical use of nuclear weapons", their development was led jointly by the Federal Republic of Germany and UK, see Michael Quinlan, "Thinking about Nuclear Weapons", Oxford University Press, 2009. Michael Quinlan was a senior official in the UK MOD and at the time one of the leading British authorities on nuclear weapons.

## **NATO recognises that arms control could limit or remove the INF threat**

84. At that time, there was no discussion of the possibility of negotiations involving the tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe<sup>59</sup>. The notion of nuclear restraint via arms control negotiations was limited to the negotiations on strategic arms between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) process. At this point, these did not involve discussions of US sub-strategic nuclear forces assigned to the Alliance.

85. This possibility entered discussions in the 1970s when, as Ambassador Maynard Glitman, Chief US negotiator for the INF Treaty, has observed<sup>60</sup>, the April 1978 Nuclear Planning Group in reaffirming the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence added that, "equitable and verifiable measures of arms control must remain an important feature of NATO's overall security policy and would contribute to efforts for furthering the process of detente." This was an unusual addition to language on NATO nuclear policy.

It meant that, in Glitman's words, "Henceforth language to the effect that arms control could substitute for, or complement, deployment would appear regularly in NATO's Communiqués."<sup>61</sup>

86. This language recognised the contribution that arms control could make to security by working alongside modernisation and limiting the threat or alternatively removing it. The precise role becomes one of emphasis and sequence. Which comes first ; the offer of arms control or the threat of modernisation? This issue underpinned the discussions and subsequent debates surrounding the development and implementation of NATO's 1979 Dual Track Decision.

87. The 1979 decision coupled the modernisation of NATO's intermediate range nuclear capabilities with the offer of arms control negotiations. It had its genesis in the gradual merging of strategic and theatre concerns of the United States and its NATO allies during the strategic arms negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

57. As the host to most of these weapons German views were understandably particularly sensitive on the issue of nuclear use; summarised by one German official "We must live with nuclear weapons, but we cannot defend Germany with nuclear weapons". Interviews with authors.

58. See "the Modernisation of NATO's Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces" report by Simon Lunn for the Committee of Foreign Affairs of United States House of Representatives Washington DC 1981.

59. With the exception of NATO's Option 111 in the MBFR negotiations and the proposal to withdraw 1000 US warheads for a Soviet tank army.

60. "The Last Battle of the Cold War" by Ambassador Maynard W. Glitman. Palgrave Press 2006 .

61. The 1978 crisis over the Enhanced Radiation Warhead (ERW) provides important context to understanding how arms control became part of NATO's nuclear dialogue. In deferring production of the ERW President Carter introduced the notion of Soviet restraint as necessary to preclude future production of the ERW. The condition of Soviet restraint suggested the possibility of an arms control route to security. This possibility carried forward in the INF debate.

# Alliance consultations on strategic arms control negotiations

**“Consultation on nuclear issues and nuclear arms control is a specific and special case of consultation”**

## **The US keeps allies informed on strategic talks**

88. US strategic nuclear forces constitute the bedrock of Alliance security. Their credibility in relation to those of the Soviet Union, and later Russia, has always been paramount. Over time, however, this relationship evolved from unquestioned US superiority to one of approximate parity or equivalence. This shift was codified by the commencement of strategic arms limitation talks (SALT1) in November 1969 (signed in May 1972) which catalysed an internal US debate on the nature of the strategic relationship and its consequences for extended deterrence. Domestic critics insisted that the US was moving to inferiority and suggested that this imbalance would have serious consequences for US allies. The status

of the strategic relationship and its consequences became a persistent theme in Alliance politics and the debates surrounding the ratification of the SALT II Treaty<sup>62</sup>.

## **The US leads on nuclear issues ...**

89. Consultation on nuclear issues and nuclear arms control is a specific and special case of consultation. As the extender of nuclear deterrence to the whole Alliance, the US has used NATO's consultation framework to inform its Allies collectively of its negotiations with the Soviet Union, and now Russia, on strategic nuclear arms.<sup>63</sup> This consultation is essential for Alliance cohesion, but problematic for the US in terms of the level of information it should

62. The perception of US inferiority and its effects on the allies was a constant theme in the criticism of SALT II. It was refuted by Senator Joe Biden in an exchange with a Paul Nitze a leading critic of the treaty. Among the European leader the Senator had met: "I have heard no one independently say to me that they believe that the US is strategically inferior to the SU". He further noted the role of critics such as Nitze in encouraging these perceptions and stressed the need "to disentrail ourselves of the false concept of nuclear superiority. The SALTII Treaty" Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations US Senate, July 1979.

63. The US delegation for the first round of the SALT negotiations with the SU that opened in Helsinki on 17 November 1969 flew via Brussels in order to brief the NAC on US strategy. "All NATO countries gave clear endorsement to the SALT agreements reflecting the deep and continuous consultations the SALT delegation maintained with the NAC". See "Double Talk: the Story of Salt I" by Gerard Smith

provide. Consultation ranges from the provision of information to joint decisions, depending on the systems involved. The US naturally leads nuclear discussions. But, under the guise of consultations, is it simply providing information or going further by actually asking for views? Striking the right balance between informing, asking, and deciding is not easy.<sup>64</sup> The question becomes more pertinent the more directly the Allies are involved and as the division between strategic and sub strategic nuclear weapons becomes more blurred<sup>65</sup>.

90. Alliance consultation on nuclear issues is particularly important today in view of potential changes to NATO's nuclear posture, but also with respect to strategic arms control and the possible renewal of New START. The Trump Administration, however, displays decidedly negative views towards arms control.<sup>66</sup> The non-US allies can influence US decisions depending on the systems under discussion and the circumstances.

This in turn requires a concerted approach among the non-US Allies. However, regardless of Allied cohesion the final decision on nuclear policy always rests with the US.

91. For strategic nuclear weapons, the depth and level of consultations with allies have varied with Administrations and has obviously often been limited by the bilateral (i.e. US-Russia) nature of the negotiations. The US commitment to keep the allies informed on the broad principles of the negotiations with Russia is longstanding. However, from the perspective of the Allies, the detail has been frequently lacking leaving fertile ground for inter-Allied misunderstandings.

92. Alliance officials have confirmed that consultation with the US during SALT II was an improvement on SALT I.<sup>67</sup> Even so, in the early stages of the SALT II negotiations, the allies were bystanders.<sup>68</sup> This changed as the support of the Allies became

64. As a NATO official noted "if the US consults too much then people say they do not lead. If the US then leads then the Allies say they do not consult." Interviews.

65. This will probably be the case in the next round of strategic arms negotiations as is discussed in para 114

66. See for example the remarks to the IISS Feb 11, 2020 of Dr Christopher A Ford, who has been delegated the authorities and functions of the US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, "The Politics of Arms Control: Getting Beyond Post-Cold War Pathologies and Finding Security in a Competitive Environment". The term "pathology" gives a fair indication of what comes next!

67. According to a senior US official, "Under Henry Kissinger, the Europeans were always informed after the event. Under Carter, from March to May proposals the Europeans were not at all consulted". Interviews with authors. This led to misunderstandings over US intentions on cruise missiles and allowed suspicions to grow.

68. See the Report on the SALT 11 Treaty of the Committee on Foreign Relations United Senate Nov 19, 1979

increasingly important in the US Congress for the potential ratification of the Treaty. European concerns were twofold. First, the Treaty's exclusion of Soviet "grey area systems", i.e. systems below the strategic level, with ranges that implied a nuclear war confined to Europe. And second, the suspicion that the US might accept non-transferability restrictions on cruise missiles in the Treaty's Protocol – seen as potentially useful for European defence.<sup>69</sup> A lack of clarity and frankness about intentions in arms control negotiations<sup>70</sup>, coupled with a lack of confidence in US leadership under President Carter, fuelled deep-seated European fears that the US was prepared to weaken its commitment to defend Europe for the sake of an agreement with the USSR to reduce the nuclear risk to the US.

### **... but the Europeans have their say**

93. Supporters and critics in the US Senate were quick to exploit European views on SALT II albeit these were generally supportive of the Treaty<sup>71</sup>. European support for the Treaty was crucial for its ratification in the US Senate and consultation was intensified accordingly<sup>72</sup>. The situation was complicated by the parallel development of NATO's decision to modernise its theatre nuclear forces which, as is discussed later, was also a reaction to European security concerns<sup>73</sup>.

94. The US Senate interest in European and Allied views on SALT II was an example of the US actively seeking and listening to European views on strategic issues. But such high profile and intense consultations are rare, surpassed only in their detail by the discussions about whether to deploy

69. According to a senior German official, this led the German Minister of Defence, Leber, to ask the US Secretary of Defense Brown, "not to sacrifice the cruise missile option on the superpower SALT altar". Interviews with the authors.

70. According to a senior UK official ; "with respect to the Protocol limits on cruise we were never adequately informed or consulted. Had the Americans been straighter we might have had fewer problems" Interviews with the authors.

71. Parliamentarians from Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, and Norway testified in support of the Treaty. Senators Jackson and Helms were in the forefront of Senate opposition to the Treaty aided by Messrs Perle and Billingslea from their respective staffs.

72. Jan 1978 President Carter promised to increasingly draw the NATO Allies into its counsels. There were 19 formal NAC consultations on SALT II progress before the Treaty signature in Vienna. See the report on "SALT and the NATO Allies" by the Committee on Foreign Relations US Senate 1979.

73. In the ratification debates, allied concerns that trends in the strategic balance could lead to decoupling were exploited by critics of the Treaty. They were again countered by Senator Joe Biden who stated that, quite the opposite. The European leaders he had met were more concerned that non-ratification of the Treaty might be seen as decoupling and as a sign of weakness. The SALTII ratification hearings US Senate 1979. The Senator was also Chairman of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Special Committee on Nuclear Weapons in Europe.

**“Through constant consultations, like a drip on a stone, NATO influences US thinking on nuclear arms control”**

Intermediate Nuclear Forces to Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nevertheless, whatever the experience of the past, it should be emphasised that NATO continues to provide the framework for constant consultation among allies on US and NATO nuclear policy, including arms control. As this report highlights, the question is whether the detail and the quality of this consultation is adequate in today's circumstances.

95. Consultation through the formal NATO framework runs in parallel with (and reinforces) bilateral consultations with Allies or multilateral exchanges in groups such as the Quad<sup>74</sup> and encourages intra-Alliance exchanges on key strategic issues. However, the views of Allies need to be offered with care as – understandably - US officials regard the nuclear dimension as an American domain. As the Senate report on SALT II made clear “the United States alone bears responsibility for

developing positions, conducting the negotiations and agreeing the resolution of issues”.<sup>75</sup>

96. Nevertheless, through constant consultations, like the drip on a stone, NATO influences US thinking on nuclear arms control, by reminding US administrations of the commitments they have made to allies.

74. An informal grouping of the three nuclear powers, plus Germany, who frequently met privately ahead of key decisions to achieve a core of agreement as a basis for eventual consensus within the Alliance, not appreciated by non-participants who regard the process as “precooking” decisions.

75. See the Report on the SALT II Treaty of the Committee on Foreign Relations United Senate Nov 19, 1979.

# The 1979 dual track decision

## The US presented options, not solutions

97. In retrospect, the NATO decision to deploy Cruise and Pershing nuclear weapons and then remove them entirely was the high point of European influence on NATO's nuclear posture and a model of NATO's consultation process. The Carter Administration established, in 1977, a High-Level Group (HLG)<sup>76</sup> within NATO, composed of all allies, except France, which reviewed NATO's nuclear posture and recommended the deployment of ballistic and cruise missiles on the territory of the European allies.

98. The dual track decision<sup>77</sup> represented a new phase in NATO nuclear consultation, in which the Europeans moved from relative spectators to active participants. Unusually, the US did not take the lead in this process but presented four options for countering Soviet

**“The 1979 dual track decision represented a new phase in NATO nuclear consultation in which the Europeans moved from relative spectators to active participants”**

capabilities and asked for European views. The European participants then pressed for the option of a new long-range US capability based in Europe, capable of striking the Soviet Union - thus ensuring it did not enjoy sanctuary status<sup>78</sup>. However, once the decision was taken in favour of INF deployment, the United States rapidly resumed the lead in its implementation.

99. The HLG recommended a “hardware” solution to the gap in capabilities. This was the single “track” of deploying 572 Cruise and Pershing missiles in accordance with the Alliance's strategy of flexible response. However, some voices – conscious of

76. The HLG comprised senior officials from national capitals and would reinforce, some suggested “by-pass”, the regular NPG mechanism which involved the NATO Ambassadors and had been found wanting during the Enhance Radiation weapons (ERW) crisis. See the report “The Demise of the INF Treaty : What are the consequences for NATO?” ELN Policy brief Simon Lunn and Nicholas Williams Feb 2019.

77. This decision did not come out of the blue. NATO's nuclear problem in long range capability and the potential of cruise missiles to solve it had been in gestation for some time, particularly among the specialists, such as the Europe-America group, who met regularly in the mid '70's in Track II type meetings. Similar groups will certainly be meeting to discuss next steps for NATO nuclear policy, but with little visibility.

78. The US FIII'S for this task were ageing and the 400 Polaris/Poseidon SLBM warheads allocated to SACEUR were not considered visible enough or capable of selective employment.



public opinion in Europe – immediately raised the issue of arms control<sup>79</sup> as an alternative, or second, track. Others were more sceptical of the necessity of the arms control track but accepted it as the “political imperative of the Alliance”<sup>80</sup>.

### **The arms control track kicks in**

100. The Special Group (SG)<sup>81</sup> of arms control experts provided the basis for the second track of the '79 decision. Taking modernisation through the deployment of INF missiles to Europe as the starting point, their recommendations explicitly recognised the potential role of arms control in constraining INF deployments and the Soviet build-up<sup>82</sup>. Arms control

thus became a key consideration for many officials who argued that, without it, NATO would always be in a militarily disadvantageous position<sup>83</sup>. Ironically, it was also due to the arms control track that the number of NATO systems to be deployed<sup>84</sup> was higher than many wanted. This, as a UK official noted, “was for bargaining purposes” in negotiations<sup>85</sup>.

101. Coupling the two tracks of modernisation and arms control reconciled the two approaches. Yet it left the Alliance with a difficult balancing act in a highly volatile political climate. Arms control suggested the possibility of lower levels of forces<sup>86</sup>. However, the Soviet Union had no incentive to negotiate

79. As one participant interviewed noted “some of us especially the Norwegians and the Dutch warned strongly that any decision on a particular aspect of the posture to deploy meant that you needed to look at arms control” . Johan Jorgen Holst, who was one of the leading participants of the HLG, a prominent defence intellectual and later Defence Minister of Norway.

80. Interview with Michael Quinlan, a senior official in the UK MOD. He was a member of NATO’s High Level Group from 1977-1981. See also footnote 56.

81. The arms control option had many parents. What is not in dispute is that the Special Group was created in February 1978, after the meeting of the 4 leaders (Carter, Schmidt, Callaghan and Giscard d’Estaing) at Guadeloupe in January, when the principle of an arms control option was endorsed.

82. “NATO’s TNF requirements will be examined in the light of concrete results reached through negotiations” NATO Communique 12 December, 1979.

83. “We focussed on arms control because we did not believe it would be possible to match the SS20. Hence there was a clear military need for arms control”. Interview with a senior German official.

84. The number of 572 systems was derived from the original range put to the HLG of 200 to 1000, and took into account the distribution among five basing countries and the configuration of cruise missiles. There was an acceptance that this number could be reduced.

85. Interviews with a senior UK official. This bargaining position is confirmed by Zbigniew Brzezinski in his Memoirs “Power and Principle”.

86. Chancellor Schmidt consistently emphasised the need for an arms control approach and according to German officials was furious on learning the modernisation decision had gone so far (see Interviews). Schmidt himself recounted that he had told Brezhnev during their talks in Moscow in 1980 that restraint by the Soviet Union in their SS20 build up - of which there only around 50 at the time - could avert NATO’s deployments. Chancellor Schmidt interview with the Frankfurter Rundschau, December 10 1981.

unless it understood that NATO was determined to deploy its own systems<sup>87</sup>. So, the intent to deploy had to be accompanied by the promise of negotiations – or, as one official put it ; “deploy if we must, negotiate if we can”<sup>88</sup>. However, the conundrum of “arming in order to disarm” was not easily understandable to the public. Deployments faced widespread and fierce public opposition.

### **President Reagan proposes the “zero option”**

102. In the early 1980s, the Alliance passed through an extraordinary period of political volatility<sup>89</sup>. Governments tried to ease the pressure or distract public attention by pointing to the ongoing Geneva negotiations on arms control and Soviet obduracy but with little success. Despite the repeated emphasis that the two tracks were parallel, and of equal weight, there was always a perception that arms control was the poor relation of modernisation. This was reinforced by the fact that attention was focused on ensuring the implementation of the NATO deployments by the scheduled date of 1983.

103. Public scepticism towards the arms control option increased with the arrival of the Reagan Administration in 1981. This Administration took an uncompromising attitude to the Soviet Union, was less sympathetic towards arms control and “détente”, and was critical of the Carter approach as overindulging the Europeans. The adoption of the Zero Option – the proposal to reduce intermediate nuclear systems to zero on both sides, announced by President Reagan in November 1981 - without prior consultation with Allies – was seen as a cynical effort to defuse the Peace movement in Europe rather than a serious negotiating position.

### **The INF example has lessons for today**

104. Pressure by the Allies persuaded the Administration to renew the bilateral negotiations in Geneva and the work of the Special Consultative Group (SCG) – the successor to the SG - in developing a collectively agreed position. This was regarded as a model of Alliance consultation and coordination<sup>90</sup>. After much fine-tuning of negotiations and terms, Gorbachev’s

87. Faced with the NATO decision, the Soviet Union indicated a willingness to negotiate but on their perception of the balance of capabilities which included American forward based systems and British and French nuclear forces - a position held from the early days of the SALT process.

88. Interviews with the authors.

89. For its part the Soviet Union tried to obstruct implementation of missile deployments through a stop-start approach to negotiations, offers based on their perception of the balance of forces and by encouraging the activities of the European Peace Movement. For further discussion see the report on “Nuclear Weapons in Europe” North Atlantic Assembly Papers 1984

90. For comments in support of the work of the SCG see the report for ELN by Lunn and Williams, “The Demise of the INF Treaty : What are the consequences for NATO?”, February 2019.

acceptance in 1987 of a double zero outcome (that is the elimination of both intermediate and short-range missiles) prepared the way for Treaty signature and a much-hailed political success.

105. However, some critics of the zero outcome were quick to point out that, with zero INF, NATO strategy had lost a key element ; a reliable capability to strike the Soviet Union from European soil with American systems<sup>91</sup>. As discussed earlier, this suggested an apparent lack of coordination in Alliance planning, with the needs of NATO's collective defence allegedly sacrificed to the nebulous attractions of arms control.<sup>92</sup> However, the political force of the Treaty and its evident benefits, particularly the verification measures, was enough for this criticism to be quietly overlooked by military critics.

106. The final stages of the INF saga are significant because it provides a rare example of arms control taking priority over the inflexible requirements of deterrence and defence and shows how the prioritisation of arms control and reductions in military capacity over

defence can lead to more, rather than less, security. This example still has lessons for today.

107. The 1979 dual track decision illustrates the potential contribution that arms control can make to security by balancing and offsetting modernisation and thereby responding to public concerns. It also highlights the political and practical difficulties of maintaining a balanced approach and underlines the imperative of consultation among Allies.

91. In his evidence to Congress SACEUR General Rogers explained that "the zero level option would put us back to where we were in 1979 in NATO, when we made the decision to fill the gap in our deterrence spectrum which had developed because the only land based system left in Europe that could reach Soviet soil was the F111 aircraft. The Zero Level Option in isolation is a fine political gambit, but militarily, it gives me gas pains". Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services, the US Senate 1987.

92. The NATO Secretary General Lord Carrington noted in his keynote presentation to the Oberammergau conference "Why was it that the voices which complained so much about the zero option were not apparently engaged in the debate from 1981 to 1986?" Author's notes. Obviously, the right people were not talking to each other!

# Nato's post-cold war nuclear policy

## **Substantial reductions in tactical nuclear weapons**

108. The post-Cold War thaw of the 1990s saw NATO substantially reduce the number of tactical nuclear weapons through initiatives announced by Presidents Bush and Gorbachev. President George H.W. Bush initiated these commitments, collectively known as the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs), in September 1991, in recognition of the break-up of the Eastern bloc and out of concern for the Kremlin's ability to maintain control of its vast nuclear arsenal as political changes swept the Soviet Union. By pledging to end foreign deployments of entire categories of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons, Bush hoped that leaders in Moscow would follow suit; and they did, at least in part. All Soviet nuclear weapons were reportedly successfully consolidated on Russian soil.<sup>93</sup>

109. The United States warheads that remained in Europe were allocated to the DCA of Allies. Thus, the residual nuclear mission became one of coupling and burden sharing, i.e. the demonstration of nuclear solidarity among allies. However, the presence of the warheads and the purpose and credibility of the DCA mission remained contentious among Alliance members.

## **Obama's nuclear zero**

110. A new round of questioning NATO's nuclear strategy was prompted by a speech by President Obama, in April 2009, in which he committed to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.<sup>94</sup> The speech generated a number of initiatives<sup>95</sup> and revived interest in the presence of the American warheads in Europe.<sup>96</sup> An attempt by several NATO Foreign Ministers to discuss the issue at their meeting in Tallinn on 22 April 2010 was quickly short-circuited by the United States. Secretary of State Clinton then secured NATO endorsement for several principles of NATO's nuclear

93. The NATO reductions involved the withdrawal to the US of all ground launched short range weapons was confirmed by the NPG in Taormina 1991. It did not cover the DCA warheads. Russia released little information substantiating its PNI activities. See Arms Control Today, July 2017. Russia retains a large stockpile of tactical warheads.

94. The Obama speech had been inspired by an article by the Gang of Four (Messrs Shultz, Perry, Kissinger and Nunn) calling for practical steps towards achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

95. These included "the European Leadership Network on Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation".

96. "We need arms control to return to the top of NATO's agenda" in "NATO can contribute to global zero" by Guido Westerwelle and Maxime Verhagen, Foreign Ministers of Germany and the Netherlands, respectively. The Volkskrant and Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 20 March 2010.

policy, including language that “as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance”<sup>97</sup>. This “Tallinn Formula” has become the Alliance mantra on nuclear policy. It also included a bow to arms control with a commitment to seek negotiations with Russia on nuclear sub strategic weapons.

111. In this context, the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept trod very carefully in defining the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy. It retained the goal of a world without nuclear weapons but with the critical conditional preface of “creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons”. All interested parties were able to express satisfaction that their concerns had been met. This formula still exists as NATO policy today.

## **NATO’s Nuclear modernisation is in progress**

112. Nuclear issues remain high on NATO’s agenda. The Alliance is considering its response to the Russian violation of the INF Treaty which consists, according to NATO, of the development and fielding of a missile system, the 9M729, in contravention of Russia’s obligations.<sup>98</sup> The Alliance will likely assess the need for a response in the context of the continuing credibility of its strategy<sup>99</sup>. Assuming that the Alliance sees no need to respond in kind to the Russian missile deployment, NATO’s nuclear posture will remain essentially unchanged. While NATO’s Secretary General has said the Alliance does not plan new deployments, interest has grown in the US’ development of a non-nuclear

97. The 5 principles were: 1. as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance; 2. as a nuclear alliance, sharing risks and responsibilities widely is fundamental; 3 a broad aim is to continue to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons while recognising that in the years since the Cold War ended , NATO has already dramatically reduced its reliance on nuclear weapons; 4. Allies must broaden deterrence against the range of 21st century threats, including by pursuing territorial missile defence; 5. In any future reductions, our aim should be to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members, and include non-strategic nuclear weapons in the next round of U.S –Russian arms control discussions alongside strategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons.

98. For discussion see articles by Katarzyna Kubiak for ELN and the NATO Defence College, 2020.

99. The 2010 DDRP decided, not surprisingly, that the strategy was fit for purpose. It took account of HLG studies in 2007 which, in looking at the options for the nuclear posture, decided that DCA “ticked all the boxes”. For further discussion of the problems with DCA see “Reducing the Nuclear Risk to Europe’, the Nuclear Threat Initiative, Washington DC, 2011. Reviews of NATO’s nuclear strategy never question the basic assumption that the presence of US warheads in Europe is needed. Concerns for their security from theft as outlined by authorities, such as Senator Sam Nunn, are brushed aside. See “NATO Nuclear Security and the Terrorist Threat” Sam Nunn, the Atlantic Council. Washington DC, 17 November 2011.

ground launched cruise missile.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, a threefold nuclear modernisation is already underway: first, in the form of replacement by several countries of DCAs capable of delivering US nuclear bombs<sup>101</sup> – a very sensitive issue for several allies; second, the introduction of the next-generation American B61 nuclear bomb, which the modernised European DCA will be capable of delivering; and third, the changes by the United States to its nuclear posture, particularly the introduction of low yield warheads. The latter has considerable implications for NATO nuclear policy which would suggest the need for a deep and frank discussion with the Allies in the NPG and HLG<sup>102</sup>.

113. This raises the broader question of Alliance consultation on the development of US nuclear policy. If the nuclear guarantee is central to Alliance strategy, then what is the responsibility of the “protected”, who benefit from this policy, to

influence its development? Does sharing NATO’s nuclear burden also imply the obligation to participate in the development, as well as the implementation, of that policy? This would imply more consultation among Allies than appears to exist today.

114. Mindful of public opinion, allies’ views on the role of nuclear weapons remain supportive without being enthusiastic, accompanied by a wish to contain and reduce levels, where possible, within a negotiated arms control framework. Hence there is broad support for the renewal of New START and an expectation that at some stage this can be extended to theatre and sub strategic or “battlefield” nuclear weapons. Many of these non strategic nuclear weapons are obviously of direct relevance and concern to non US allies. Their inclusion in bilateral US Russia negotiations will necessitate close consultation with allies on the lines of the work of the SCG in the 1980’s and discussed in this report.

100. As yet, it is unclear what the intention is behind the development of the new mid-range, ground launched cruise missile that is under development in the US. See briefing with Ambassador Marshall Billingslea, US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control, August 18, 2020, who stressed; “So what’s important for us to do is to get this capability [i.e. medium range ground launched cruise missile capability] from prototype to a deployed – a deployed and deployable system”. Nuclear armed or not, deployments of such a system to Europe would require a consultation with allies. (see <https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-ambassador-marshall-billingslea-u-s-special-presidential-envoy-for-arms-control-and-lt-gen-thomas-bussiere-deputy-commander-of-the-u-s-strategic-command/>).

101. Few believe that these arrangements have political or operational credibility; “it is difficult now to see any compelling security or political case for their retention.” Michael Quinlan, “Thinking about Nuclear Weapons”, 2009. For other arguments see the report “Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe” NTI Washington DC 2011. Their principal justification lies in sharing the burden of Alliance nuclear policy.

102. See “Critiquing the State Department’s Nuclear Force Posture” George Perkovich May 6 2020 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

## **Trump Administration sets unrealistic conditions for renewal of New START**

115. So, with the modernisation of NATO's nuclear posture in prospect, what is the outlook for nuclear arms control? Unfortunately, not great. Expectations for nuclear arms control are hostage to the attitudes of the principal actors. Russia has indicated an interest in renewing New START but has not been forthcoming on including systems of intermediate- or short range<sup>103</sup>. The attitude of the current American Administration adds even greater uncertainty; having jettisoned two major arms control agreements, it considers the New START Treaty, signed by Presidents Obama and Medvedev in Prague in April 2010, as deeply flawed. Moreover, it has set steep conditions for treaty renewal, including the eventual participation of China and the (technically seriously difficult) verification of all nuclear warheads. The recent Russian offer of a freeze on nuclear warheads has breathed a degree of optimism into the negotiations by indicating the serious intent of both to reach an agreement; while leaving unexplored the crucial detail of verification.

116. Ambassador Billingslea, the US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control, has kept NATO informed

through confidential briefings to the North Atlantic Council. Very little is known about the detail of these consultations, or of the positions taken by non-US allies - presumably, Billingslea called for Allied support for the US's highly conditional approach to the renewal of New START and for Allies not to complicate the US negotiating position by making incompatible public statements. As a result, it is noticeable that allies have been slow to come out publicly and strongly in support of treaty renewal, probably out of deference to the US negotiating position. It can be of little comfort to those supporting these negotiations that the two principals responsible for US arms control policy in the Trump Administration, Dr Christopher Ford and Marshall Billingslea, are not noted for their enthusiasm for arms control.<sup>104</sup> This makes it all the more important and urgent that US allies make their support for New START renewal known.

117. No NATO members have signed the Treaty banning nuclear weapons. However, alongside the NPT review preparations, there are several efforts to jumpstart progress in disarmament.<sup>105</sup> The debate on NATO's role in nuclear policy and its contribution to arms control is far from over.

103. "Arms control best hope for the time being is to preserve US- Russian nuclear parity and cooperative transparency" Dr Anya Loukianova Fink "Walking on Broken Glass" ELN, 12 February 2020.

104. See remarks in footnote 66.

105. For discussion of initiatives aimed at jumpstarting progress towards disarmament in the run up to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty Review conference see "CEND and a changing global order" Heather Williams ELN 20 Feb 2020.

## What lies ahead?

118. In the short-term, prospects for arms control are bleak. This makes the question of greater NATO involvement both more difficult and more urgent. One immediate problem is the absence of an interested and committed partner for either conventional or nuclear negotiations, but the wider trends are consistently negative: the traditional arms control agenda has the added problem of the need to “deepen”, through the challenge of new systems and technologies, and to “broaden” by the inclusion of other parties, namely China. In other words, the nuclear arms control agenda will be full and challenging.<sup>106</sup> It will require a concerted effort by the NATO allies to encourage and support further initiatives.

119. In the longer term, what lies ahead for NATO's role in arms control? This report concludes that arms control is in NATO's DNA, but it is very much a secondary consideration. In other words, arms control does not occupy a sufficiently visible or influential place in NATO's approach to security, taking a distant second place behind military strength. Despite official declarations, arms control is rarely recognised as an integral part of contemporary defence and deterrence.

**“This report concludes that arms control is in NATO's DNA, but it is very much a secondary consideration. In other words, arms control does not occupy a sufficiently visible or influential place in NATO's approach to security...”**

120. This report outlines the benefits arms control can bring to security. These are the constraints and regulation of armed forces and armaments; the creation of transparency, predictability and confidence; the savings in expenditure through the commitment to lowest possible levels of armament; and reassurance to the public that security consists of more than military strength and preparations. However, these benefits are subordinate to the military dimension too often.

121. As the principal organiser of armed forces, NATO is the organisation to which many turn when armaments and arms control are discussed. This fails to account for the limits on NATO's influence imposed by the nature of arms control agreements, as well as the nature and structure of the Alliance itself. As outlined in this report, NATO's role is the sum

106. For ideas on the need to revitalise arm control see proposals by the ELN Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe “Managing the cold peace between NATO and Russia ELN position paper 5 July 2017



**“NATO members collectively bear special responsibility for demonstrating that arms control considerations are given a proper hearing in NATO security policy.”**

of both individual and collectively agreed policies. Members differ in their support for different aspects of arms control. For most members, Russian actions and attitudes underpin NATO's preoccupation with deterrence and defence. Nevertheless, consistent with long-standing Alliance policy, the need for dialogue to accompany military preparations is recognised - albeit too often as a secondary consideration. Arms control represents the most appropriate vehicle for dialogue and also responds to public concerns by offering an alternative route to security.

122. NATO provides coherence and force multiplication to the individual force capabilities of the allies by providing the framework for collective defence. It also provides an invaluable framework for discussion and coordination of arms control policies. Balancing these two pillars provides the basis for Alliance security, but is a permanent challenge for NATO members. This report suggests that in NATO policy the military dimension continues to take priority over arms control; a rebalancing is needed.

123. NATO members therefore collectively bear special responsibility for demonstrating that arms control considerations are given a proper hearing in Alliance security policy. Russian attitudes will continue to constitute a major obstacle but, as in the past, the obduracy of the adversary should not be allowed the last word. In that sense, the spirit of Harmel still has something to offer.

124. It may be argued that circumstances have so changed since the end of the Cold War that the traditional benefits of arms control are no longer relevant for an Alliance whose functions have expanded and whose risks have multiplied. NATO is now facing increasing challenges to security, such as hybrid, cyber and space threats, and the rising power and assertiveness of China, which are outside the traditional, European-centric and militarily-focused arms control frameworks of the past. But that is not an argument for the outmodedness of arms control. On the contrary. It is an argument for reflecting on how the benefits of arms

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control – regulation, transparency, predictability, avoidance of needless overspending – can be applied to these contemporary concerns.

125. The scale of damage to national economies from Covid-19 will require the substantial re-allocation of resources towards the rebuilding resilience in economic and health systems. This will be costly, but necessary. In this context, the serious pursuit of arms control could contribute to the more secure environment needed for the international cooperation which will be necessary to recover from the devastating effects of the coronavirus.

126. The vigorous promotion by Alliance members of arms control initiatives through the collective voice of NATO would be an appropriate way to further demonstrate NATO’s relevance. This report has suggested that NATO should give more prominence in its internal structures by creating a Division for Arms Control, and tasking the military to focus more on proposals for arms control. But structural and procedural improvements are not enough. Under the Secretary General, a group of NATO experts is currently carrying out a reflection process to strengthen NATO’s political dimension.<sup>107</sup> Secretary General Stoltenberg has also indicated that the “time has come to develop a new Strategic Concept for NATO”.<sup>108</sup> The upgrading and integrating arms control fully into NATO policy and action should be among its highest priorities.

107. “Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced the appointment of a group of experts on Tuesday (30 March 2020) to support his work in a reflection process to further strengthen NATO’s political dimension”. See [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_174756.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174756.htm)

108. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Global Security 2020 (GLOBSEC) Bratislava Forum, 7 October 2020. The new Concept would be “a new blueprint for how NATO can adapt and respond to a changing security environment.” See [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_178605.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_178605.htm)



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