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NATO Publications

Info

Chapter 2: The Transformation of the Alliance**L NATO's Nuclear Forces in the New Security Environment**

Since the end of the Cold War, the Alliance has taken far-reaching steps to adapt its overall policy and defence posture to the new security environment. In realising their new broad approach to security, which recognises the importance of political, economic, social and environmental factors in addition to the indispensable defence dimension, NATO member countries have taken full advantage of the opportunities provided by the momentous improvements in the security environment. NATO's nuclear strategy and force posture were among the first areas to be reviewed. They are also the areas that have been subjected to some of the most radical changes. The most significant changes are described below.

During the Cold War, NATO's nuclear forces played a central role in the Alliance's strategy of flexible response. To deter major war in Europe, nuclear weapons were integrated into the whole of NATO's force structure, and the Alliance maintained a variety of targeting plans which could be executed at short notice. This role entailed high readiness levels and quick-reaction alert postures for significant parts of NATO's nuclear forces.

In the new security environment, NATO has radically reduced its reliance on nuclear forces. Its strategy remains one of war prevention but it is no longer dominated by the possibility of nuclear escalation. Its nuclear forces are no longer targeted against any country, and the circumstances in which their use might have to be contemplated are considered to be extremely remote. NATO's nuclear forces continue to contribute, in an essential way, to war prevention. Their role is now more fundamentally political and they are no longer directed towards a specific threat. They are maintained at the minimum level sufficient to preserve peace and stability.

In keeping with the reduced salience of nuclear weapons in Alliance strategy, NATO's nuclear posture was radically reduced. As the Cold War ended, NATO's nuclear powers took unilateral steps to cancel planned modernisation programmes for their nuclear forces. France announced the early cessation of Hadès missile manufacturing. The United States and the United Kingdom cancelled plans for a nuclear tactical air-to-surface missile. As a precursor of later decisions to eliminate ground-launched nuclear systems, the United States also cancelled plans for a nuclear-capable follow-on system to the LANCE surface-to-surface missile and for the production of a new 155 mm nuclear artillery shell. France has, since 1991, reduced the types of

nuclear delivery systems from six to two; today, the independent French nuclear forces consist only of four submarines carrying submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) and of Mirage 2000N aircraft with medium-range air-to-surface missiles.

Since 1992, the United Kingdom has given up its nuclear LANCE and tube artillery roles, its maritime tactical nuclear capability previously based on surface ships, and all air-launched nuclear weapons, thus eliminating the nuclear role for its dual-capable aircraft. Trident submarines are now Britain's only nuclear system.

In October 1991, following an initiative by US President Bush, NATO decided to reduce the number of weapons available for its sub-strategic forces in Europe by over 85 percent. This reduction was completed in July 1993. As part of these reductions, all nuclear warheads for NATO's ground-launched sub-strategic forces (including nuclear artillery and surface-to-surface missiles) were eliminated and air-delivered gravity bombs were reduced by well over 50 percent. In addition, all nuclear weapons for surface maritime forces were removed. The elimination process included some 1 300 nuclear artillery weapons and 850 LANCE missile warheads. All of the nuclear warheads that had been assigned to these forces have been removed from the NATO inventory. Most of them have already been eliminated and the remaining weapons are to be eliminated in the near future and returned to the United States.

The United States has also completely eliminated all naval non-strategic/sub-strategic systems except submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles, which are no longer deployed at sea in peacetime. In addition, it completely terminated the nuclear role for its carrier-based dual-capable aircraft. Today, the only land-based nuclear weapons available to NATO are United States nuclear bombs capable of being delivered by dual-capable aircraft of several Allies.

NATO nuclear storage sites have also undergone a massive reduction (about 80 percent) as weapon systems have been eliminated and the number of weapons reduced. At the same time, a new, more secure and survivable weapon storage system has been installed.

With the end of the Cold War, in a further significant change, NATO ceased to maintain standing peacetime nuclear contingency plans and associated targets for its sub-strategic nuclear forces. As a result, NATO's nuclear forces no longer target any country. Taking further advantage of the improved security environment, NATO has taken a number of steps to decrease the number and readiness levels of its dual-capable aircraft.

In another unilateral initiative, in December 1996, NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers announced that enlarging the Alliance would not require a change in its greatly reduced nuclear posture and that NATO has *"no intention, no plan, and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new member countries, nor any need to change any aspect of NATO's nuclear posture or nuclear policy, and that it does not foresee any future need to do so"*. NATO's remaining much smaller

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sub-strategic forces will, for the foreseeable future, continue to meet the Alliance's deterrence requirements.

1. The terms "strategic" and "sub-strategic" have slightly different meanings in different countries. Strategic nuclear weapons are normally defined as weapons of "intercontinental" range (over 5 500 kilometres), but in some contexts these may also include intermediate-range ballistic missiles of lower ranges. The term "sub-strategic" nuclear weapons has been used in NATO documents since 1989 with reference to intermediate and short-range nuclear weapons and now refers primarily to air-delivered weapons for NATO's dual-capable aircraft and to a small number of United Kingdom Trident warheads in a sub-strategic role (other sub-strategic nuclear weapons having been withdrawn from Europe).

