

The Military Adaptation of the Alliance

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Supporting Paper



The GLOBSEC NATO Adaptation Initiative, led by **General (Retd) John R. Allen**, is GLOBSEC's foremost contribution to debates about the future of the Alliance. Given the substantial changes within the global security environment, GLOBSEC has undertaken a year-long project, following its annual Spring conference and the July NATO Summit in Warsaw, to explore challenges faced by the Alliance in adapting to a very different strategic environment than that of any time since the end of the Cold War. The Initiative envisages a series of policy papers which will address the nature of NATO adaptation and the challenges it must overcome if it is to remain a viable and credible alliance for the peace and stability in the transatlantic area. The policy papers published within the GLOBSEC NATO Adaptation Initiative are authored by the Initiative's Steering Committee members: **General (Retd) John R. Allen, Admiral (Retd) Giampaolo di Paola, General (Retd) Wolf Langheld, Professor Julian Lindley-French, Ambassador Tomáš Valášek, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow** and other acclaimed authorities from the field of global security and strategy. The aim of the involvement of such a wide array of experts is to reinforce the unique partnership between policy-makers, military leaders and leading academics and commentators. These policy papers will prelude and result with the publication of the Initiative's Steering Committee Recommendation Two Pager and the Main Report to be launched in October 2017. The Interim Report will be released during the GLOBSEC 2017 Bratislava Forum.

These outputs will be augmented by shorter policy papers (on cybersecurity, A2/AD capability, intelligence, and threats emanating from the South) prepared by the GLOBSEC Policy Institute between January and October 2017.

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NATO Adaptation Project: Supporting Paper

ONE NATO

The Military Adaptation of the Alliance

By

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“Through the longer term Adaptation Measures of the Readiness Action Plan, we have... Enhanced the NATO Response Force (NRF), increasing its readiness and substantially enlarging its size, making it a more capable and flexible joint force comprised of a division-size land element with air, maritime, and special operations forces components.”

The Warsaw Summit Communiqué, 8-9 July 2018

Introduction

Over the coming years NATO must be the primary instrument in changing the role of the bulk of European armed forces from being mere stabilisation and nation-building forces lacking a sufficient level of warfighting capability into a more integrated force which is verifiably trained and able to fight brigade or division-size units inside and outside of NATO territory. NATO forces must be capable of fighting high-intensity battles with both robustness and endurance, generate a demonstrable ability to effectively counter and withstand large-scale conventional attacks, operate in a nuclear environment, and be able to progressively engage new and currently little understood threats arising from cyber-attacks in what is a new domain of warfare. In other words, NATO must change from being a post-Cold War crisis management institution into a last resort “go-to-war” Alliance reinforced by an appropriately robust mind-set among its political and military leaders. Under Adaptation there are four critical areas of NATO’s military posture which require particular attention; the NATO Command Structure, the NATO Force Structure, Force Generation, and the re-creation of military manoeuvre.

Colonel J. F. C. Fuller created what he called the Master Principle of Military Doctrine. (FN) NATO’s Master Principle must be to require and support Alliance nations to generate and maintain a critical (and lasting) military advantage across nine domains of security and defence: air, land, sea, space, cyber, knowledge, education/training and resilience. One of the critical enablers, particularly with respect to the Russian threat in Europe and a credible defence and deterrence posture, will be logistics. This requirement goes far beyond the pure availability of transportation capabilities as the rapid movement of large-scale Alliance forces in an emergency will require serious changes to EU and national legislation to permit such a movement of forces across borders.

A Robust Alliance?

In other words, NATO must change from being a post-Cold War crisis management institution into a last resort “go-to-war” Alliance reinforced by an appropriately robust mind-set among its political and military leaders. Specifically, this aim will require NATO to generate and maintain a critical (and lasting) military advantage across nine domains of security and

defence: air, land, sea, space, cyber, knowledge, education/training and resilience. One of the critical enablers, particularly with respect to the Russian threat in Europe and a credible defence and deterrence posture, will be logistics. This requirement goes far beyond the pure availability of transportation capabilities as the rapid movement of large-scale Alliance forces in an emergency will require serious changes to EU and national legislation to permit such a movement of forces across borders.

NATO's Four Military Adaptations

Under Adaptation four critical areas of NATO's military posture require particular attention; the NATO Command Structure, the NATO Force Structure, Force Generation, and the re-creation of military manoeuvre, and *NATO Command Structure (NCS)*: In light of the deteriorating security environment post 2014, NATO agreed at the Warsaw Summit to again review its command structure. However, a simple review will be inadequate as a driver of the agreed Adaptation because the current Alliance command structure is based on the Alliance's Strategic Concept approved in November 2010. And, although the triple missions of collective defence, crisis management, and co-operative security remain intellectually valid the strategic context demands a rebalancing of efforts between the three missions. This document was intended to last about a decade, but lost significant relevance either as political guidance or a planning driver with Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Further blows to the lasting and enduring validity of NATO's strategy comes from the ongoing destabilization of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which requires the Alliance to refocus and re-balance its attention not only to the east, but also to the south. Consequently, given these pressures and the policy and strategy Adaptation they are driving many NATO Allies now argue in favour of developing a new, updated Strategic Concept relevant to the essential challenges and changes in the security landscape. However, the earliest option for tasking NATO with initiating a new strategy debate would be the so-called "Mini Summit" in May 2017, which is traditionally reserved for providing a transatlantic forum for the newly elected US President.

However, even if the Alliance's Heads of State and Government used the occasion to launch a new Strategic Concept, or rather the process towards the drafting of it, it would take far too long to provide NATO with appropriate structures for rapid and successful military action. Rather, NATO urgently needs to structurally include the commitment to military adaptation enshrined in Paragraph 37 of the Warsaw Summit Declaration into its military posture. These elements would necessarily include the various elements of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), including the further strengthening of the enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF), and the Enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe. In other words, if the Alliance is to successfully realise a '360 Degree Approach' NATO must swiftly develop and adapt structures for the simultaneous command of collective defence and collective security operations, not only to the east and eventually to the south, but also to the high north or deep into the Atlantic. Like it or not, and even if politically sensitive, NATO is unlikely to be able to avoid a form of command regionalisation, at least in the sense of prioritising the areas of main interest and concentrated military focus.

NATO Force Structure (NFS) and Force Generation: NATO's force structure has never adequately implemented the framework provided for by the command structure, as both were mutually insufficient. There have been several problems. NATO nations provide headquarters or forces of varying quality and quantity. Moreover, the availability and readiness of these

forces during times of crisis is highly questionable. Instead, too often both the command structure and force structure were seen by most nations as 'stone pits' for them to further cut their respective capabilities and expenditures. NATO has thus provided an alibi for, and a tacit acceptance of, cuts to both the command and force structures. These cuts were partly justified because in the security environment prior to 2014 territorial defence operations under Article-5 scenarios appeared to be extremely unlikely. Consequently, training and exercising of the entire command structure has been carelessly neglected over many years; a form of defence negligence that can no longer be acceptable if the defence and deterrence posture is to remain credible. For example, from 2015 NATO increased its training activities and has step-by-step begun to include realistic conflict scenarios. However, NATO exercising and training is still a very long way from the kind of sobering but authentic scenarios for which the Alliance trained (as an Alliance) in the old days of the WINTEX exercises (Winter Exercise) during the Cold War.

Exercising and training are not only a pre-condition for sending credible deterrence messages to any imaginable opponent; they are also a pre-condition for effective Adaptation. Trained structures are swiftly adaptable to changed contingencies, whereas untrained forces require undue time which might not be available in the case of emergency. This is particularly true given that the various units of the NATO Response Force will have to operate hand-in-hand with heavier follow-on units, or with other elements of the NATO force structure. Furthermore, there is a difference between exercising and training; only well-trained forces can perform successfully in realistic exercises. Hence, there is a need to train the entire NATO chain of command (including at the nuclear level), followed thereafter by exercises to rehearse authentic contingencies. 'Train as you fight' must be the guiding principle.

Re-establishment of Manoeuvre Capability: NATO's recent focus on crisis management or counter insurgency operations has profoundly changed the way Alliance military operations are conducted. In the campaigns in the Balkans and/or Afghanistan, which focused on stabilisation and nation-building, even combat operations were undertaken by relatively small units. NATO forces in effect have spent two decades "unlearning" the Cold War 'art and science' of manoeuvring in battalions, brigades or divisions as these formations have been neither practiced nor exercised for what is now a long time. The effect on the military leadership level, as well as on the efficiency of military staffs in all NATO countries (even to some extent the US) has been severe. The problem has been recognized by some Allies, such as Germany and the Netherlands which created multi-national, brigade-size units. However, the re-establishment of NATO's manoeuvre capability is proving to be slow. NATO still lacks an appropriate and modern command and control system that is compatible and interoperable with the military forces of all of its member nations. A similar set of challenges also holds true for major weapons systems; NATO Allies lack key components of the force inventory, such as sufficient main battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers, helicopters, intelligence, or transport capabilities.

For the Alliance to swiftly generate compatible and interoperable forces capable of achieving an appropriate level of readiness rapidly and thus able to rotate throughout the course of an Article 5 contingency all member states must engage. At the very least, NATO should re-establish a robust system of "tactical evaluation", i.e. undertake a mutual assessment of capabilities across all Allied militaries. In principle, such an exercise would need to be undertaken across all force levels. However, priorities will need to be chosen, developed and enforced. Equally, at the very least, old problems such as a lack of standardized equipment across the Alliance force base must be seriously tackled by all NATO members as a matter of urgency.

Doctrines and Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs)

With the end of the Cold War, and particularly since the beginning of the campaigns in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, military doctrines (the way armed forces do business) have altered significantly. For good reason, counter insurgency operations (COIN) has dominated military thinking. Today, given the renewed relevance of a possible Article 5 contingency, NATO must be ready to act across the full spectrum of military employments, demanding the full spectrum of military capabilities, ranging from crisis-management operations to counter insurgency campaign, and beyond to enduring combat if needs be as part of territorial defence.

Modernization of the Nuclear Posture: Russia's revisionist policies since 2014 not only require a fundamental reassessment of NATO's conventional capabilities, but also the Alliance's nuclear posture. This holds all the more true as Moscow not only broke international law in Ukraine, but under the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine and the concept of 'nuclear de-escalation' Russia has been using its growing short, intermediate, and strategic nuclear arsenal to intimidate if not threaten its neighbours. Moreover, by conducting illegal over-flights with nuclear bombers, and by simulating nuclear strikes against Sweden and Poland, Russia would appear to be extending its supposed sphere of influence well into EU and NATO territory, and in so doing threatening the Alliance and its members.

Equally, for all the apparent similarities with the nuclear confrontation of the Cold War, in fact the nuclear environment and NATO's future deterrence requirements differ in at least two important respects from those of the old East-West conflict. First, today's Russia cannot be compared to the former Soviet Union in scope, reach, or power. Whilst the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War to some extent out-matched NATO in terms of conventional military capability, Moscow's conventional capabilities today are clearly inferior to those of the United States and its Allies; a fact of which Russia is well aware. Russian military planning for a potential conflict in Europe is thus focused on preventing US support of its NATO Allies and blocking the deployment of US armed forces across the Atlantic, hence the Russian military focus on A2/AD or Anti Access/Area Denial. Russia also considers its nuclear arsenal as a useful military substitute for its lack of an extensive and deep conventional weapons capability. In other words, Russia could at best sustain a short war, and even that might prove ruinous for a fragile Russian economy that is roughly half the size of that of the United Kingdom. The irony is that Russia's force posture is to a significant extent the reverse of that during the Cold War when it was NATO that relied on nuclear deterrence to make up for conventional shortcomings and shortfalls on the old Central Front.

Second, nuclear deterrence is no longer primarily a bilateral and symbiotic US-Soviet matter, much though Moscow would like it to again become. Rather nuclear deterrence is a set of multilateral relationships involving a number of nuclear players and multiple decision-making centres. The most concerning of those centres is North Korea, which is fast developing into a global source of instability, irrationality and danger. While Pyongyang's first nuclear test was conducted as early as 2006, it remained unclear for a long time whether the regime would actually be capable of producing functioning nuclear weapons that could be miniaturised sufficiently to be deployed atop an intercontinental ballistic missile capability. After three more nuclear tests in 2009, 2013 and 2016, there is now hardly any doubt. Although knowledge about the status and extent of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme remains fragmented, it is not unreasonable to assume that Pyongyang could in a few years possess more nuclear warheads than either France or the United Kingdom. A largely erratic actor consumed by the

paranoid fear of losing power has thus joined the nuclear club. And, nuclear escalation in the Far East would definitively and critically affect the vital security and defence interests of all NATO Allies. Moreover, a concrete and real North Korean nuclear threat could also encourage key players in the region to develop their own nuclear capabilities – a development that may well have been accelerated by the often lurid talk of presidential candidate Trump during the 2016 US presidential campaign.

These differing factors raise a number of radically new issues regarding the future role of nuclear weapons as part of the Alliance's defence and deterrence posture. An obvious question concerns how to deter today's Russia; a country which is also a declining power as it has no economic basis to back up its aspirations to become again an actor of global significance that in the wider strategic scheme is also inferior in military terms. Russia's weakness is less a result of low energy prices than of its decades-long failure to take the necessary economic, political and social steps towards modernisation. It is possible that Russia will not be able to fulfil the needs of its people a few years hence, which might well lead to destabilization or even disintegration. Practicing nuclear deterrence with declining powers is generally difficult because it cannot be excluded that an inferior adversary panics or becomes irrational as state decline turns into state failure.

NATO's Future Nuclear Posture

Another question that will affect NATO considerations over its future nuclear posture is whether any treaty-based nuclear arms control will endure into the Third Nuclear Age. After all, arms control, unlike disarmament, is part of defence policy. If successful it enables states to build-down armed forces, both conventional and nuclear. Russia not only sees its nuclear weapons as a functional part of its armed forces that can be used to compensate for deficiencies in its conventional posture, but an essential part of the 'prestige; underpinning and upholding the Putin regime domestically. Therefore, for the time-being Moscow is unlikely to have any real interest in reducing its nuclear capabilities. Paradoxically, since a number of outdated, Cold War nuclear systems are due to be phased out, there may still be some decrease in the respective sizes of the strategic nuclear arsenals of both the United States and Russia. Russia is also undertaking a significant programme for nuclear force modernisation (FN). And, non-proliferation (be it vertical or horizontal) is another area of potential collaboration that Russia now rejects, with Moscow refusing to cooperate or share information.

In November 2014, Russia declared that it would no longer participate in the annual Russian-American summit meetings on nuclear safety. One month later, Russia announced its withdrawal from the bilateral cooperation programme designed to increase nuclear safety under the so-called Nunn-Lugar Act. Since 1991, the US has provided considerable financial and material support for the safe scrapping and disposal of Russia's surplus nuclear weapons and nuclear submarines. The purpose of this programme, which was designed by US Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, was to prevent radioactive substances, nuclear weapon components and nuclear expertise from falling into the wrong hands.

However, the deteriorating nuclear relationship is most acute where it concerns tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. Today, the chances of concluding new treaties that could bring about further reductions are now virtually zero, primarily because Russia sees such weapons as a "usable" part of its armed forces necessary to balance what it sees as NATO's conventional superiority. Instead there are signs that Russia is circumventing the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) by stationing new treaty-illegal systems, such as *Topol M*,

Iskandr M and *Iskandr Kalibr* systems. Consequently, NATO countries in Eastern Europe have little interest in a withdrawal of the few American nuclear weapons that are now stationed in Europe, as they are seen as a symbol of America's Alliance commitments. These states became concerned when during the US election campaign, then presidential candidate Trump put the US nuclear commitment for NATO into question.

Adapting NATO's Nuclear Posture

How can future Alliance deterrence strategies be effectively combined with sustainable crisis communication? If Russia continues to launch nuclear bomber aircraft as an implicit threat or in order to extend its supposed and self-declared sphere of influence, to send nuclear submarines to foreign coastal waters, or simulate nuclear strikes against neighbouring countries, then the risk of misunderstanding and accidents will increase. In 2014 alone, there were fourteen risk or high-risk incidents (i.e. entailing a considerable risk of escalation) counted between Russian and Western aircraft or ships. The need for renewed and shared security measures is pressing. For example, any of these incidents were caused by Russian aircraft turning off transponders and in all fairness, Western military aircraft also regularly fly with their transponders switched off. What security precautions must be taken in order to prevent an inadvertent military confrontation or accident – be it conventional or even nuclear?

Finally, there is a pressing need for a debate about how nuclear co-operation between NATO's three nuclear powers, the United States, Britain and France, can be improved in order to re-establish a coherent deterrence strategy. Since the late 1950 there has been close nuclear co-operation between Washington and London, and of late Britain and France have considerably stepped up their nuclear relations since the Lancaster House agreement of 2010 (FN JLF Chatham House paper). France and the United States also discreetly co-operate on nuclear matters. What is missing from NATO's nuclear equation is sustained and systematic trilateral coordination that goes beyond an occasional exchange on nuclear forensics. France, while apparently not generally opposed to such co-operation, at the same time does not want it to be conducted in the relevant NATO bodies, such as the Nuclear Planning Group.

Faced with a changed nuclear reality and a multitude of unanswered questions in an uncertain and to some extent deteriorating strategic environment NATO will have to put nuclear deterrence back on the agenda. Therefore, three immediate steps are of particular urgency: a) to clarify the mushrooming nuclear terminology of recent years; b) agree on a new NATO nuclear strategy; and c) adapt NATO's nuclear posture accordingly.

With respect to the nuclear terminology, the post-Cold War period has led to conceptual differences within the Alliance and to a host of ambiguous nuclear terms. By and large most western and southern members of NATO regard nuclear weapons as a relic of the past and insisted on very generic wording in NATO's nuclear policies. According to this narrative, NATO's nuclear capabilities are not directed against a specific threat or a specific opponent. Many Eastern European Allies, though, have always regarded NATO's nuclear deterrence as being directed against the residual threat from Russia. These conceptual ambiguities have led to a number of equivocal terms such as "tailored deterrence", "comprehensive deterrence", or even "complex deterrence", which blur an important line between conventional and nuclear deterrence. Conceptually, it may even be inappropriate to use the term "Weapons of Mass Destruction", which is meant to subsume into one concept nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological weapons. What is needed is a precise debate on deterrence requirements that can distinguish between nuclear weapons and all others.

With regard to the specifics of NATO's nuclear strategy, it is worth noting that the Alliance enshrines its nuclear deterrence concept in a document with the cumbersome title, *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR)*. However, this document was approved at the NATO Summit in Chicago in 2012, and is based on two fundamental assumptions that no longer apply today: Russia is a partner of NATO, and will not threaten to use its nuclear weapons against NATO. Since 2012 Moscow has ended its partnership with NATO and, moreover, is simulating the use of nuclear weapons against neighbouring countries during almost all of its major military exercises. Therefore, NATO will inevitably be forced to redraft its nuclear strategy.

Some might argue that a new nuclear concept could only be developed *after* NATO has agreed on a new Strategic Concept. However, this is not necessarily true. The DDPR of 2012 was not written because NATO agreed on a new Strategic Concept in 2010. Instead, it was the reaction to an initiative from the then German Foreign Minister Westerwelle who sought to withdraw all US nuclear weapons from German soil. Given that a new nuclear consensus in NATO is desperately needed, a nuclear debate could, and frankly should start independently from any discussion on a future Strategic Concept.

NATO's Military Adaptation: Getting the Mix Right

Any Alliance debate on nuclear deterrence requirements in the context of Article 5 will necessarily imply a discussion on NATO's nuclear posture and on the question of stationing. In DDPR, NATO declared that it is committed to maintaining an "appropriate mix" of conventional and nuclear weapons. It further stated that the "existing mix of capabilities and the plans for their development are sound". If this was the case in 2012, then it cannot be the case today, since the Alliance confirmed at its Warsaw Summit in 2016 that the security situation has fundamentally changed. NATO has thus to agree upon a new mix of nuclear, conventional and presumably defensive means (including missile defence). In any such strategic re-assessment of *how* to deter *whom* and by *what means*, the stationing of US nuclear weapons, currently deployed in a number of European states, will have to come under scrutiny, as will the deterrence value of the two other NATO nuclear powers, France and the United Kingdom.

Equally, this is no reason for nuclear alarmism. Despite the tensions with Russia, nuclear weapons will not regain the significance they had as a currency of power during the Cold War. Their numbers have been dramatically reduced over the past decades, at least in the relations between Russia and the United States, and it is unlikely that there will be a new nuclear arms race. Moreover, nuclear deterrence is also now only a small part in the overall spectrum of the military effort. Effective and deployable conventional armed forces are arguably more important for the stability of Europe and beyond. Still, the nuclear question is certainly back on the Adaptation agenda.



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