

I. INTRODUCTION

1. NATO declaratory policy consistently states that a credible defence and deterrence posture includes a combination of nuclear, conventional, and missile-defence capabilities. As a result, nuclear weapons remain central to NATO policy. Still, while a critical element of NATO deterrence, the Alliance's nuclear weapons posture and management have long been issues largely left on the margins of discussion and debate about NATO's defence and deterrence adaptation.

2. However, technological developments and concerns about a deteriorating global arms control regime have recently brought debates about Allied nuclear weapons and the Alliance's nuclear posture to the forefront of policy discussions in Brussels and across Allied capitals.

3. In the context of this renewed focus on nuclear capabilities both in the Alliance and across the globe, this draft general report will review NATO's current nuclear posture and highlight the debate surrounding its future. To this end, the draft report will underscore the challenges of maintaining an effective global nonproliferation regime in an era where all nuclear powers across the globe are investing in the modernisation, and in some cases the expansion, of their nuclear capabilities.

II. NATO'S NUCLEAR POSTURE

4. NATO's nuclear pillar is strongly reliant on the strategic forces of the United States, as well as the strategic forces of both France and the United Kingdom. Both the United States and the United Kingdom make nuclear weapons available to the Alliance as part of their national nuclear policies¹. The United States remains committed to an extended deterrence posture, which provides allies protection under its nuclear 'umbrella'. To achieve this extended posture, the United States maintains its nuclear triad² of delivery systems, forward-deployed non-strategic weapons, and readily deployable US-based nuclear weapons (US DoD, 2018). The United Kingdom's sea-based nuclear deterrent is committed to UK and NATO security³.

5. Within the NATO context, the United States forward-deploys approximately 150 nuclear weapons⁴, specifically B61 gravity bombs, to Europe for use on both US and Allied dual-capable aircraft. These bombs are stored at six US and European bases – Kleine Brogel in Belgium, Büchel in Germany, Aviano and Ghedi-Torre in Italy, Volkel in The Netherlands, and Inçirlik in Turkey. In the hypothetical scenario they are needed, the B61 bombs can be delivered by US or European dual-capable aircraft⁵. The decision to maintain the non-strategic gravity nuclear bombs in Europe is principally due to Russia's maintenance of a large number of tactical nuclear weapons in its arsenal⁶ (IISS, 2019; Andreassen et al., 2018). The Alliance also maintains weapons across bases in Europe and Anatolia to ensure broad Allied involvement in NATO's nuclear mission and as a concrete reminder of US nuclear commitment to the security of NATO's European Allies (Lunn, 2019).

¹ Both the United States and the United Kingdom retain ownership and command and control over their nuclear forces. France's sea and air-based strategic forces remain independent, but French national security policy allows the Alliance to consider that France's strategic forces 'contribute' to the Alliance's deterrence posture (NATO, 2010).

² Meaning air, land, and sea-capable delivery systems for nuclear warheads.

³ While committed to NATO security, any use of UK nuclear weapons for Alliance purposes would have to have authority from the UK prime minister.

⁴ This is down from a Cold War peak of 7,300 US nuclear warheads stored in Europe in 1971 (Andreassen et al., 2018).

⁵ B61 bombs assigned to US and European aircraft at the bases are under US control and are only useable with presidential authority. Those weapons assigned to Allied aircraft may only be used after the US president has released them to NATO (Andreassen et al. 2018).

⁶ Estimates are that Russia maintains approximately 2,000 non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons in its arsenal (IISS, 2019).