

NATO's Sixty Year Legacy: Threat Of Nuclear War In Europe

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Since its birth the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has envisioned the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear nations.

One of the fundamental purposes for the creation of NATO in 1949 was to introduce the permanent stationing of nuclear weapons in Europe.

In a Europe that, in 1949, had no nuclear nation and no atomic bombs of its own.

Whether the United States after the devastating display of its new weapon over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945 deployed atomic bombs in Europe prior to 1949 will perhaps never be revealed, though reports claim that in 1948 Washington endorsed the deployment in Great Britain of B-29 strategic bombers capable of carrying bombs with nuclear warheads.

What is certain is that after the founding of NATO on April 4, 1949 US nuclear weapons were stationed in several member countries and that several hundred remain on the continent to this day.

The launching of the alliance in no way signalled the beginning of a post-World War II reality in Europe but a continuation of the war, with the former Axis powers Germany and Italy incorporated into NATO and the Soviet Union the new adversary.

On his way to the American White House in January of 1953 General Dwight D. Eisenhower, formerly Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe, became NATO's first Supreme Commander in 1951. Even the title didn't change.

What had changed was that a military alliance had been formed in Europe by the only nuclear power at the time, the United States.

The official NATO handbook, reflecting on the nuclear doctrine of the bloc since its inception, says:

"During the Cold War, NATO's nuclear forces played a central role in the Alliance's strategy of flexible response....[N]uclear 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."

<http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb0206.htm+nato+nuclear+warheads&cd=1&hl=>

NATO was inaugurated on April 4, 1949. The Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb on August 29, 1949.

In that almost five month hiatus NATO had a nuclear monopoly in Europe. With current US and NATO plans for integrated missile defense and with ongoing air patrols over the Baltic Sea, the Alliance is attempting to reassert its strategic, nuclear dominance over the continent, a topic to be addressed in more detail later.

From 1949 onward NATO's nuclear doctrine has been one described as "flexible response"; that is, the first use of nuclear weapons against a conventional, non-nuclear opponent or for what had been a conflict with conventional weapons.

Its Article 5 mutual military assistance obligation was enforced, as noted earlier, several months before the Soviet Union had even tested an atomic weapon.

The rationale employed for this policy was that the Soviets at the time possessed conventional military superiority on the European continent and in the event of an armed conflict with the USSR the United States and its new NATO allies would resort to atomic attacks.

The Alliance's Defense Doctrine of November 1949 called for insuring "the ability to carry out strategic bombing including the prompt delivery of the atomic bomb. This is primarily a US responsibility assisted as practicable by other nations."

The deployment of US nuclear weapons in Europe was effected through what is known as "nuclear sharing," the basing of nuclear weapons on the territories of NATO non-nuclear weapon states.

By the mid-1950s the US had confirmed the deployment of nuclear arms in Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The stationing of such weapons increased steadily so that by the early 1970s there were an estimated 7,300 US nuclear weapons deployed in Europe.

As to what use these weapons might be put to, US National Security Archive documents released five years ago provide a horrifying indication.

In a meeting of the National Security Council in 1973 chaired by the National Security Adviser (and Secretary of State) of the time Henry Kissinger, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Adm. John P. Weinert, seemingly without reservation or regret, announced this plan:

"Now our objective is (to destroy) 70 percent of the floor space of war-supporting industry. A better criterion would be the post-recovery rate plus hitting the Soviet Army to prevent it from overrunning Europe.

"Another choice is to go for people - a goal of 70 million Russians for example."
(Associated Press, November 24, 2004)

Although the bombs stored in Europe were American and under the control of the Pentagon, war plans called for their loading onto fellow NATO nation's bombers for use against the

Soviet Union and its (non-nuclear) Eastern European allies.

The Alliance states hosting the weapons were Belgium, Britain, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands and Turkey.

All except for Greece still house US nuclear arms on their territory.

With the dissolution of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact in 1989 and of the Soviet Union itself two years later, NATO scaled back on nuclear weapons stationed in its member states but has retained several hundred to the present moment.

Several hundred tactical nuclear bombs and the advanced aircraft capable of delivering them are still in NATO's arsenal in a post-Cold War Europe in which Russia is the only potential target.

The Strategic Concept adopted by the Alliance in April of 1999 – when NATO proved to be what its opponents had always suspected it was intended to be, an alliance for waging war as it was at the time against Yugoslavia – reaffirmed its commitment to its nuclear posture:

“The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.

“A credible Alliance nuclear posture and the demonstration of Alliance solidarity and common commitment to war prevention continue to require widespread participation by European Allies involved in collective defence planning in nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces on their territory and in command, control and consultation arrangements. Nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance. The Alliance will therefore maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe.”

Although the Pentagon has never and still doesn't acknowledge the true figures, the Federation of American Scientists estimates there are between 200 and 350 warheads at bases in Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Turkey.

A Time Magazine report of June of last year revealed that “The U.S. keeps an estimated 350 thermonuclear bombs in six NATO countries. In four of those — Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands — the weapons are stored at the host nation's air bases, where they are guarded by specially trained U.S. military personnel.

“A ‘burden-sharing’ agreement that has been at the heart of NATO military policy since its inception.

“Although technically owned by the U.S., nuclear bombs stored at NATO bases are designed to be delivered by planes from the host country.”

The bombs include B61-3, B61-4, and B61-10 nuclear weapons at eight different bases.

The B-61 in its latest variant, the 1997 Mod 11, is a thermonuclear gravity bomb and 180 are estimated to be stationed on European airbases under the NATO nuclear sharing

arrangement. It is the standard contemporary American nuclear bomb.

The basing of nuclear arms in non-nuclear-weapon states with the further intent of their being used by warplanes of the latter under NATO “burden sharing” and “nuclear sharing” agreements runs afoul of the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT].

Article I of the Treaty states:

“Each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any non-nuclear-weapon State to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons or explosive devices.”

Article II continues:

“Each non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to receive the transfer from any transferor whatsoever of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”

Five of the six NATO nations still hosting US nuclear weapons and obligated to deploy their own aircraft to use them if ordered to are non-nuclear-weapon states: Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Turkey.

Last June a spokesman for the Global Peace and Justice Coalition in the Turkish city of Adana, only a few kilometers from the Incirlik air base used for decades by the US and NATO, asserted that Incirlik contained the largest amount of US nuclear weapons outside the United States itself and “We have organized many protests for this base of war to be shut down and for the disarmament of the nuclear warheads. We do not wish to see Adana and Turkey becoming Hiroshima. We will not give up.” (Turkish Daily News, June 30, 2008)

In the same month a German federal official, Ulrich Wilhelm, stated that his nation was duty-bound to the use of nuclear arms as an alleged military deterrent and added, “For the foreseeable future....we remain of the view that a deterring military capacity includes not only conventional capacity but also nuclear components.” (Agence France-Presse, June 23, 2008)

Up to 20 US nuclear warheads are reportedly deployed at the German airbase in Buechel, where they can be mounted on German Tornado fighter planes for missions to the east. An additional 130 American warheads are suspected to be stored at the US airbase in Ramstein for similar purposes.

German peace groups and the Left Party have for years demanded the removal of the weapons and a nuclear-free Germany.

In December of 2007 the mayors of the Italian cities of Aviano and Ghedi, which both host dozens of US nuclear warheads, signed a petition demanding the abolition of all nuclear

weapons.

“Stefano Del Cont, mayor of Aviano since June, said he and Anna Giulia Guarneri, the mayor of Ghedi, joined hundreds of other city leaders around the globe in seeking the ban. They’re all members of Mayors for Peace, an organization started in the 1980s by the mayor of Hiroshima — one of two Japanese cities hit by atomic bombs at the end of World War II.” (Stars and Stripes, December 18, 2007)

The references to Hiroshima by both the Turkish and Italian opponents of nuclear warheads in their nations under NATO obligations are not alarmist.

In January of 2008 an 150-page manifesto was prepared for the then upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania by General John Shalikashvili, the former chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff and NATO Supreme Commander, General Klaus Naumann, Germany’s former top military commander and ex-chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, former Dutch chief of staff General Henk van den Breemen, former French chief of staff Admiral Jacques Lanxade and British field marshal and ex-chief of the general staff and the defence staff Lord Inge.

It stated inter alia that “The first use of nuclear weapons must remain in the [NATO] quiver of escalation as the ultimate instrument to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction” as well as demanding the “end of European obstruction of and rivalry with Nato,” and “the use of force without Security Council authorisation....”

As recently as this January NATO Supreme Commander General John Craddock reinforced the point, stating:

“[T]he fact is there is strategic need and advantage for nuclear weapons....The alliance has made the decision to have them. There has been no debate to retrograde them out.” (GovExec.com, January 9, 2009)

Pentagon chief Robert Gates commissioned a report that was released on January 8 of this year which urged that the “United States should keep tactical nuclear bombs in Europe and even consider modernizing older warheads on cruise missiles....”

The report included the contention that “The presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe remains a pillar of NATO unity.” (Washington Post, January 9, 2009)

NATO has come full circle. Or rather it has never abandoned its plans for nuclear superiority, only now not only in Europe and the so-called Euro-Atlantic sphere, but globally. And it no longer hides its intention to use nuclear weapons first and against non-nuclear nations.

Since the accession of the three Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into NATO in April of 2004, Alliance warplanes have flown air patrols over the Baltic Sea region in six month rotations by member states.

Most all the NATO partners have used the jet fighter of choice for most Alliance members, the US Raytheon-produced F-16. (France has used Mirages and Poland and Romania MIGs.)

Though a jet fighter, the F-16 is a modern multirole combat aircraft which among other capabilities has that of dropping 1,000-pound bombs as it has in Iraq and Afghanistan and of firing cruise missiles. Cruise missiles can be equipped with nuclear warheads.

Raytheon has recently successfully tested its Network Centric Airborne Defense Element missile defense system on the F-16 with the intercept of a test ballistic missile.

The US Baltic rotations have employed the F-15 Eagle, the latest version of which, the F-15E Strike Eagle, is equipped with laser-guided Bunker Buster bombs and anti-satellite missiles.

NATO warplanes flying over the Baltic Sea states are within a four minute flight from Russia's second-largest city, St. Petersburg.

See:

Baltic Sea: Flash Point For NATO-Russia Conflict

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/message/37592>

The most advanced current US stealth bomber, the B-2 Spirit, is described by its manufacturer, Northrop Grumman, as "a low-observable, strategic, long-range, heavy bomber capable of penetrating sophisticated and dense air-defense shields. It is capable of all-altitude attack missions up to 50,000ft, with a range of more than 6,000nm unrefuelled and over 10,000nm with one refuelling, giving it the ability to fly to any point in the world within hours."

Its prospective replacement, the New or Next Generation (2018) Bomber, will be yet more difficult if not impossible to detect with radar and repulse by air defenses and would be the warplane of choice to deliver nuclear payloads deep inside the interior of an intended target nation as it is able to "survive in hostile airspace for extended time" and can carry nuclear weapons.

The deployment of either of the above to Europe would raise an alarm in Russia for just that reason, but could be done under NATO "mutual defense" auspices, either to Poland and the Baltic states or to newly-acquired US strategic airbases in Bulgaria and Romania, directly across the Black Sea from Russia.

See:

Black Sea: Pentagon's Gateway To Three Continents And The Middle East

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/message/37498>

Cloaked in secrecy as they have been for more than half a century, if US warheads are transported from bases in Germany to Poland, Estonia or Bulgaria, it won't be reported on the evening news.

The air component is an integral part of a broader strategy that also includes nuclear cruise missiles and the third position American missile shield plan for Eastern Europe that would serve as the foundation for a NATO continent-wide missile system.

A commentary in the Russian Information Agency Novosti of almost two years ago provided this unnerving scenario:

"[L]ong-range cruise missiles should be launched from [several] areas to hit Russian ICBM silos. Their flying time to targets is between 2.5 and three hours. The American ABM in Europe is supposed to destroy the surviving Russian missiles. This is the whole point....[T]here are numerous indications of a war in the making."

On the issue of so-called missile defense plans for NATO nations in general and new member states in Eastern Europe in particular, see:

21st Century Star Wars And NATO's 60th Anniversary Summit

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/message/36725>

Last month the same above-cited Russian source warned that, "The missile defense problem has nothing to do with Iran, but it cannot be separated from Russia's relations with NATO countries. It is impossible to pluck the issue of missile defense out of the whole range of security issues in Europe....At the end of the day the possible deployment of American bases with strike weapons in the new NATO member countries is no less of a threat than the deployment of a missile defense system or the possible accession of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO."

No less a Western establishment authority as the Council on Foreign Relations recently quoted an expert acknowledging that "[Russia believes] that nuclear missiles will be deployed in Poland near Russia and these nuclear missiles will have also a first-strike capability and could hit Moscow before [Russia's response] could get airborne, so this is going to actually be seen not so much as missile defense as a deployment of first-strike capability." (Council on Foreign Relations, March 18, 2009)

Although the deployments of US warplanes, missiles and nuclear warheads in Europe are often presented as bilateral arrangements between Washington and the respective host countries, in fact they are an inevitable and ineradicable component of NATO relations and demands.

Self-styled global, 21st Century NATO will meet for its sixtieth anniversary summit in France and Germany in three days and is expected to craft a new Strategic Concept, one that will leave few spots on Earth unaffected.

And it will reaffirm its policy of basing and when it deems fit using nuclear weapons.

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