



ELN

EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP NETWORK FOR
MULTILATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
AND NONPROLIFERATION

ELN Background Brief

NATO's Nuclear Policy after Lisbon

The Summit Documents and the Way Ahead

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SUMMARY

NATO's new Strategic Concept seeks to ensure the relevance of the Alliance to the security challenges of the 21st century. Its development involved a reassessment of the strategy of deterrence and defence including inevitably the role of nuclear weapons. This traditional assessment was however, accompanied by parallel concerns over the threat of proliferation and a consequent growth in support for reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons. Alliance views on how the Concept should respond to these twin pressures differed sharply. Some members were reluctant, and in some cases absolutely opposed, to see any reduction in the nuclear role. Others wanted NATO to demonstrate support for the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons.

The documents adopted at Lisbon – the new Strategic Concept and the accompanying Declaration had to reconcile these views. This report provides an analysis of the treatment of NATO's nuclear policy in both documents, provides an assessment of the outcome from Lisbon, and looks to future prospects. It is based partly on meetings at NATO with officials from national delegations and the International Staff in November and December 2010 and January 2011.

In the discussions surrounding the production of the two documents four elements were of particular significance: the language describing the purpose of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy; the need for the continued deployment in Europe of U.S nuclear warheads; the adoption of Missile Defence for the defence of territory as a NATO mission; and NATO's role in disarmament, arms control and non proliferation. Each raises fundamental questions concerning the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy and each raises the question of relations with Russia.

Consultations between the three nuclear powers and with Germany eventually produced the compromises and trade off's that satisfied national positions and facilitated consensus on the final Documents. As a consequence the language on nuclear policy is relatively brief. For some observers this indicates satisfaction with the status quo. For others it indicates the continued existence of differences in the key areas.

Several members had pressed for a nuclear posture review. Others were not so enthusiastic. The Lisbon documents resolved the problem by calling for a comprehensive review of the overall deterrence and defence posture. The scope and organisation of this review have still to be decided. At a minimum it should provide guidance on the requirements of each component of NATO strategy, identify the linkages between them and ensure the coherence of NATO's collective effort. Time and circumstance will most likely determine that this will be achieved by using the work underway in the Committees with relevant competences and tying the components together.

A review of NATO's nuclear requirements will need to take account of the existing study by the High Level Group which is currently in abeyance but also the specific guidance in the new Concept – namely the emphasis on the participation of allies in the peacetime

basing of nuclear weapons and the statement that further reductions by NATO will require engaging the Russians on greater transparency and on the size of their stockpiles of short range nuclear weapons.

Both of these benchmarks effectively condition any change to existing arrangements and suggest that changes to NATO's nuclear posture cannot be expected any time soon. This brings us full circle to the question of modernisation of the dual capable aircraft (DCA) and the probable need, pending the review, to extend the life cycles of those platforms assigned the nuclear mission in ways that minimise additional expenditure.

The size and location of the Russian stockpiles of sub strategic weapons is a major source of concern for NATO members, particularly to those in close proximity to Russia and has now moved to centre stage in NATO deliberations. However as of now Russia has shown little interest in discussing these systems other than pointing out they should be deployed only on home territory.

The U.S has stated that sub strategic systems will be included in future arms control negotiations with Russia but in what format is not clear. If at some stage these systems are included in bilateral negotiations the U.S will have to consult its Allies on NATO's requirements. This highlights the need for close coordination between the definition of force posture and proposals for arms control negotiations and also the need for NATO to decide its requirements in advance of US-Russian negotiations on the issue.

The outcome of Lisbon in the field of nuclear policy was in the words of one NATO representative "enigmatic". It confirmed the status quo but left the door open for future adjustments through the Review, and made the appropriate gesture to those seeking change with the proposed new work of the Disarmament Committee. Changes will depend on developments in the strategic environment and will only arrive when there is unanimous agreement that they serve NATO's collective security interests.

In assessing future prospects it is important to remember the specific characteristics of the NATO nuclear policy process which produce an innate conservatism towards nuclear policy. This traditional approach, the heavy hand of consensus and the competition of other more pressing issues explain why the nuclear issue normally enjoys a quiet life. They also explain why formal decisions frequently do not meet the expectations of those who follow these issues in the "outside" world.

But this may be changing as people realise that traditional approaches and the status quo may not be adequate to deal with the threat of proliferation. It may be necessary to look beyond the narrow approach of deterrence and defence and give priority to non proliferation diplomacy even if this has consequences for NATO's chosen deterrence posture.

The ELN is well placed to begin to develop and build this approach.

NATO's Nuclear Policy after Lisbon:

The Summit Documents and the Way Ahead

I. Introduction

1. The decision by NATO to develop a new Strategic Concept was seen by some members as an opportunity to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy and demonstrate support for the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Other members however did not support, and some absolutely opposed, changing the importance attached to the nuclear component in NATO strategy. Throughout the first half of 2010, debate focussed specifically on the presence of approximately 200 U.S nuclear warheads in Europe. The decision by the German coalition to seek the withdrawal of these warheads from its territory and the support shown for this position by the Foreign Ministers of several other countries created some momentum in favour of changing NATO's current nuclear arrangements.

2. This momentum, however, was quickly stifled by the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Tallinn last June and the adoption at that meeting of five principles proposed by Secretary of State Clinton.¹ These principles were designed to establish an agreed framework within which NATO's nuclear policy would be developed. There was also an explicit emphasis at Tallinn on the need to avoid unilateral actions by any individual NATO member state. While this was not a principle as such there was general agreement that decisions should be taken by the Alliance as a whole. Despite the Tallinn outcome there were still hopes that in its new Concept NATO could demonstrate a reduced role for nuclear weapons, both in their stated purpose and the force posture required, and an increased support for disarmament and arms control.

3. The new Strategic Concept and the Lisbon Summit Declaration that accompanied it both contain language on NATO's nuclear policy and its role in disarmament and arms control.²

¹ The five principles were as follows: **1.** As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance; **2.** As a nuclear Alliance, sharing nuclear risks and responsibilities widely is fundamental; **3.** A broad aim is to continue to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons while recognizing 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.

² The aim of a Strategic Concept is to chart NATO's course for the next ten years by establishing the principles and parameters that underpin its purposes and goals. The new Concept took a year to develop in an unusually transparent process involving a Group of Experts and a series of seminars with think tanks and academics. The consultation process with Alliance members, however, was more constrained compared with past practice.

4. The Summit Declaration provides commentary on the current issues in which NATO is directly involved and of immediate relevance. The language is of necessity more actual and detailed. The Declaration also contains approximately 13 “taskings” for follow up implementation most due for completion by mid 2011. Because of its immediate relevance the Declaration proved more contentious than the Concept.

5. In both the Concept and the Declaration nuclear policy and the related issue of arms control proved to be issues on which consensus was difficult to reach.

6. Four elements were of particular significance to these discussions: the language describing the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy; the continued need for the deployment in Europe of U.S nuclear warheads; the adoption of Missile Defence for the defence of territory as a NATO mission, and NATO’s role in disarmament, arms control and non proliferation. Each of these issues raises fundamental questions concerning the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy and each in some way raises the question of relations with Russia.

7. Discussions among an informal group of interested countries failed to produce agreed language. Eventually consultations between the three nuclear powers and the informal groupings frequently used to develop a basis for consensus produced a series of compromises and trade offs on the major differences that allowed consensus to be achieved. These compromises: satisfied French concerns that the Strategic Concept language would not imply any reduction in the role of the nuclear component; in return allowed the adoption over French hesitations of missile defence as a NATO mission, a key U.S concern; and agreed a higher profile for disarmament, a German concern. The issue of NATO’s nuclear posture and the presence of the U.S nuclear warheads was resolved through French acceptance of a NATO nuclear posture review, a concern of several countries, which evolved at the proposal of the U.K into a review of deterrence and defence posture as a whole. In this paper, we examine first the wording on NATO nuclear policy in the new Strategic Concept and the Lisbon Summit Declaration, before then examining the wording on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation in both of these documents. We then go on to explore the questions that a NATO Review of deterrence and defence posture will need to address, and comment on the prospects for this review, given some of the constraints that are likely to operate on it.

II. NATO Nuclear Policy

The Strategic Concept

8. As a result of the compromise to settle French concerns that the language on nuclear policy should not imply any reduction in the role of nuclear weapons the language in the new Concept compared with the two previous Concepts is extremely brief. This relative brevity means that key issues on the purpose and posture of NATO's nuclear forces are left unanswered. This in turn has led to different interpretations. Some suggest that by saying little the Concept in effect confirms existing arrangements and therefore the status quo. Others argue the reverse; in saying little the Concept leaves the door open to change. Which interpretation proves true will depend on future developments concerning the much anticipated review of deterrence and defence and on related developments in the political environment.

9. In its Preface the Concept commits NATO "to the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons". This is the first time NATO leaders have formally supported the goal of a nuclear free world. However, this support is conditioned by the phrase "creating the conditions for". Moreover it is then buttressed by one of the five Clinton principle's adopted in Tallinn that "as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance". According to participants in the negotiations, French officials were particularly insistent that any reference to a nuclear free world be accompanied by the appropriate conditionality.

10. The section of the Strategic Concept on Defence and Deterrence locates nuclear weapons as part of the now familiar "appropriate mix" for the core element of deterrence; it uses the language from the '99 Concept that the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote; and repeats the principle that as long as nuclear weapons exist NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.

11. However, the new Concept no longer contains the language from the 1999 Concept that describes the purpose of NATO's nuclear forces as to counter all forms of aggression. The absence of such language has led to speculation on the compatibility of NATO's nuclear policy with the language in the U.S Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).The NPR contains negative security assurances and therefore narrows the circumstances in which the U.S would contemplate use of nuclear weapons.

12. The Concept repeats the 1999 language that the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the U.S and the independent forces of the U.K and of France, "which have a deterrent role of their own".

13. However, the 1999 Concept contained extensive language on both the need for the maintenance of adequate sub strategic nuclear forces in Europe, and their composition. This language is again missing from the new Concept. It is precisely the need to maintain these sub strategic forces that has been the centre of contention for the past year with the German coalition calling for their withdrawal from German territory and other countries supporting, in different ways, the idea that it was time for NATO to consider changes to its nuclear posture.

14. On the question of the capabilities necessary to deter and defend, the new Concept states only that the Alliance will:

“ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defence planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces and in command, control and consultation arrangements.”

15. There is no specific reference to European territory in the context of peacetime basing as was the case in the '99 Concept. This omission almost certainly reflects the sensitivity of the issue. It could be argued equally that the reference is unnecessary as it is covered by the phrases “broadest possible participation of Allies.....in peacetime basing of nuclear forces”. However, the references to coupling and linkage in the 1999 Concept are not repeated and the emphasis on participation would suggest that burden sharing is now the most valued element in the rationale for sub strategic forces.

16. The Concept states NATO's intention to develop the capability to defend territories and populations against ballistic missile attack as a core element of collective defence moving forward. While NATO has long accepted the need to protect deploying forces from ballistic missile attack this is first time NATO has accepted the protection of territory and population as a core mission.

17. Missile defence has always been a sensitive issue for France, because it has been seen by some in that country as representing a threat, in the longer term, to the credibility of the French independent deterrent. French opposition to the adoption by NATO of territorial defence as a formal mission softened however and as part of the compromise France did not stand in the way of agreement in Lisbon, though the relationship between missile defence and nuclear deterrence proved to be an issue of contention between France and Germany until the very last minute: Germany arguing that missile defence would allow a reduction of the nuclear component in deterrence and France taking the position that there was no such connection and that while Missile Defence could reinforce nuclear deterrence it could not substitute for it.

18. In the months preceding Lisbon several members had pressed for a NATO nuclear posture review in the hope that this would address the question of extended deterrence and the continuing need for the deployment of sub strategic forces in Europe. Other members however who were satisfied with the existing arrangements did not see such a need. France in particular was hostile to a nuclear posture review. A compromise was reached by a general reference in the Concept to:

“continue to review NATO’s overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance...”

19. The Declaration provided more detail on the review which at the proposal of the U.K evolved into a more general review of deterrence and defence.

The Summit Declaration

20. Turning to the Lisbon Summit Declaration, from the perspective of nuclear policy and arms control the key paragraphs are 30 and 31. Paragraph 30 proved particularly contentious as it was drafted at a relatively late stage to the irritation of several delegations. It underscores the commitment to ensuring the full range of capabilities to deter and defend the Alliance and the maintenance of the “appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence forces” This is the first time that missile defence is added to the mix and the Declaration confirms that missile defence will become an integral part of the overall defence posture. Emphasising that the goal is to bolster deterrence the Declaration then turns to the question of a review by tasking the North Atlantic Council (NAC), in permanent session (Ambassadors) :

“to continue to review NATO’s overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance. This comprehensive review should be undertaken by all Allies on the basis of deterrence and defence principles agreed in the Strategic Concept, taking into account WMD and ballistic missile proliferation. Essential elements of the review would include the range of NATO’s strategic capabilities required, including NATO’s nuclear posture, and missile defence and other means of strategic deterrence and defence. This only applies to nuclear weapons assigned to NATO.”

21. In view of the political expectations that had been created before Lisbon and the positions of several members there was an expectation that a nuclear posture review would be established. The enthusiasm for such a review was not shared by all and was opposed by France despite the fact that France does not participate in NATO nuclear policy or posture. In the event the concept of a nuclear review was enlarged, at the suggestion of the UK, to cover the entire spectrum of deterrence and defence. The Declaration has been interpreted as setting in train a comprehensive review of deterrence and defence. However attitudes towards this review remain to be determined and for some the phrase “to continue to review” leaves a degree of uncertainty about the necessity and nature of the review.

22. It remains to be seen what shape the Review will take. The first round of discussions by the NAC are scheduled for Feb 1st 2011. Decisions will be needed on how the review will be conducted, by which Group or Groups, and in which timeframe. There is a question over the participation of France in the nuclear part. According to participants French officials were extremely sensitive to any mention of the word nuclear whether in

the context of the review of deterrence and defence, or of missile defence, or disarmament. The reference to “all Allies” would suggest French participation but the precise nature of this involvement remains to be decided. French participation in the drafting of nuclear policy would be consistent with past practice. However it is thought that French participation in discussions of NATO’s force posture would not be acceptable to the members of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) in which France still does not participate. The potential scope and organisation of the Review is discussed further in paragraphs 29-35 of this paper.

III. NATO's Role in Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation

The Strategic Concept

23. Turning from NATO nuclear policy to Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation, the new Strategic Concept states that NATO will continue to play its part in reinforcing arms control and promoting disarmament, repeats the resolve to seek a safer world and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons - with the now familiar conditionality "in accordance with the goals of the NPT Treaty, in a way that promotes international stability ,and is based on the principles of undiminished security for all".

It notes the dramatic reductions in the number of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and the reduction on reliance on nuclear weapons in NATO strategy and states:

"In any future reductions, our aim should be to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on its nuclear weapons in Europe and to relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members. Any further steps must take into account the disparity with the greater Russian stockpiles of short- range nuclear weapons."

24. Different estimates exist on the number and the location of Russian sub strategic systems. Some estimates place the number at approximately 3000 compared with the approximately 200 U.S nuclear warheads based in Europe for NATO. Western observers have long expressed their concern over the Russian stockpile particularly from the safety and security perspective. Although their existence has not featured directly in the rationale for NATO's own sub strategic systems there is nevertheless general agreement of the need to "do something" about the Russian stockpile. For some NATO members particularly those in close proximity to Russia the elimination of this disparity has become a priority and a compelling reason to sustain NATO's current arrangements. The relevance of the Russian stockpile is discussed further in paragraphs 36-37.

The Summit Declaration

25. The Lisbon Summit Declaration also devotes 4 paragraphs to arms control and disarmament and among various comments welcomes the new START Treaty and looks forward to early ratification. Ratification by the U.S Senate has, of course, now been achieved. Assuming the Russian Duma also ratifies it is worth noting that it is hoped that

the success of new START will create the climate of trust and confidence that will facilitate progress in other areas.

With regard to NATO's nuclear weapons the Summit Declaration also notes the dramatic reductions in the numbers and role of NATO nuclear weapons and confirms that NATO will seek to create the conditions for further reductions in the future. However, it does not repeat the language in the Concept concerning the need for reciprocal measures by Russia.

26. Several members have persistently argued for NATO to play a more active role in arms control and disarmament with France just as persistently opposing such a role on the grounds that it was not an appropriate role for a military organisation. However as part of the political trading over the emphasis to be given to nuclear weapons and disarmament respectively it was agreed that the NAC be tasked:

“to establish a Committee to provide advice on WMD control and disarmament in the context of the above, taking into account the role of the High Level Task Force(HLTF).”

27. Efforts by France to limit this Committee to the life of the Review through the use of the term “ad hoc” were resisted. However its precise sphere of competence as well as its longevity remain uncertain and awaits further definition.

28. It is difficult for NATO as an organisation to play a formal role in arms control as this falls within the prerogative of governments. In this respect the Summit Declaration suggests the role of the new Committee will be to maintain and further develop appropriate consultations among Allies. While the wording is somewhat obscure past practice would suggest that such a Committee could be used to coordinate an Alliance approach for bilateral negotiations in which NATO interests are involved such as future negotiations between Russia and the U.S on sub strategic forces or discussions with Russia on transparency and Confidence Building Measures (CBM's) on conventional forces.

IV. Next Steps

29. The Concept's minimalist language on nuclear policy is notable more for what it omits than what it includes and reflects the difficulties of achieving consensus on the substance or detail in relation to the purpose and posture of NATO's nuclear forces. As a result several key issues remain to be resolved. These include:

- a. The need for greater clarity on the purpose of NATO's nuclear forces. Some countries believe that the language NATO uses should be seen to be consistent with the language in the U.S Nuclear Posture Review.
- b. Further clarity on the need, or otherwise, of continued deployment of U.S sub-strategic nuclear warheads in Europe, for use by dual capable aircraft of Allies.
- c. Consideration of the consequences of the addition of Missile Defence as an NATO mission.
- d. The need to elaborate greater detail on the scope and timeframe for the Committee established in the Declaration "to provide advice on WMD control and disarmament in the context of the review above."

These issues will need to be addressed in the comprehensive review and its individual elements.

A Comprehensive Review of Deterrence and Defence

30. The recommendation to review the deterrence and defence posture suggests that members should have the opportunity to re-examine the essential components of NATO strategy and within this, a review of the nuclear policy and posture would form a central element. The recommendation leaves open the possibility for change if members see this in their national and collective interest and dependent on developments in the international environment. The fact that not all members are enthusiastic about the need for such a review may, however, limit the scope of its mandate.

31. As previously noted, the precise form this review will take and how it will be conducted is not yet clear and has to await discussion and guidance from NATO Ambassadors. A comprehensive approach would imply an assessment of the key components of NATO strategy namely – conventional, nuclear and missile defence and those new threats thought relevant – and the provision of the guidance lacking in the Concept on the capabilities required in each of these areas to face the diverse range of threats.

A key part of the comprehensive approach would also be to identify the interrelationships and linkages between the various planning areas including disarmament and arms control.

32. A truly comprehensive ‘top down’ review would be a considerable and time consuming exercise as it would involve revisiting the key planning assumptions such as the threat assessment, political considerations and resource guidance. The absence of a single threat and the fluidity of the strategic environment argue against this approach.

33. Time, circumstance and political attitudes will probably dictate a more limited exercise which takes as its starting point the work ongoing in the respective components and ensures maximum coordination and coherence between them. The overall aim has to be to ensure that NATO strategy has the capabilities appropriate to the range and diversity of threats, responds to the political circumstances, and takes account of resources available. The term comprehensive places a premium on the importance of coordination in ensuring the coherence of the resulting effort.

33a. The review, in short, should “operationalise” the new Strategic Concept. While the strategic environment invalidates direct comparisons, a review would aim to provide the same coherence to NATO’s deterrence and defence efforts as provided by the strategic concepts of the Cold War - a form of flexible response for the 21st century.

34. In terms of organisation it would be logical to see several layers. The NAC in permanent session would be responsible for producing the comprehensive report and providing overall coordination and supervision. The Ambassadors would delegate the regular day to day supervision to their Deputies, reinforced when necessary with the appropriate expertise either from within their delegation or from national capitals. The Deputies Committee would in turn draw on the work in the relevant Committees with the competences in the respective areas – conventional, nuclear, missile defence, and the other security threats thought relevant, and the Disarmament Committee.³

A NATO nuclear posture review

35. A review of NATO’s nuclear requirements would be a central element of this comprehensive process. However again, several questions remain. Which Group within NATO would be responsible? Would this be the responsibility of the High Level Group and those at NATO with responsibility for nuclear affairs? Who would ensure that the critical political dimension is fully taken account of? What is the status of the existing study by the High Level Group?⁴ According to NATO officials this recommended a continuation of the existing DCA arrangements but was put to one side pending the development of the new Strategic Concept.

³ This structure remains to be decided for the current review, but it is likely that a structure similar to that described here will emerge.

⁴ The High Level Group produced several confidential reports during the last four years addressing the nuclear force posture in the 21st century that concluded that the existing Dual Capable Aircraft arrangements remained the most appropriate option. See page 8 in, "NATO'S Tactical Nuclear Dilemma" Chalmers and Lunn, RUSI Occasional Paper, 2010.

36. A new posture review would also obviously need to revisit the question of whether continued deployment in Europe of U.S sub-strategic nuclear warheads was necessary. But in this respect it would need to take account of the guidance, albeit rather sparse, provided in the new Concept namely:

“ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defence planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces and in command, control and consultation arrangements.”

This guidance appears to place an emphasis on the burden sharing rationale and would appear to be more than a hint towards a continuation of the existing arrangements.

The review would also have to take account of the guidance in the section on Arms control, Disarmament, and Non Proliferation in the Strategic Concept that further reductions would require reciprocal measures from Russia.

Russian sub strategic systems

36a. As discussed earlier the size and location of the Russian stockpile has become a major source of concern for alliance members and one which dominates current NATO thinking. Hence the desire to engage the Russians in achieving transparency on these systems and addressing the disparity.

36b. The U.S has made it clear that future negotiations with Russia will include non strategic weapons but there has been no clear indication how this will be done. Nor have the Russians thus far shown any sign of interest in discussing sub strategic systems. Russian sources often suggest that their sub strategic weapons are to offset what is seen as NATO's advantages in conventional forces. Western analysts also suggest that the Russian navy has a particular interest in maintaining these systems. Russian officials have also pointed out their systems are deployed only on their own territory.

36c. If negotiations on sub strategic systems were agreed – in whatever format - the U.S would need to consult with its Allies on NATO's requirements. It is important therefore, that the Alliance decides on these requirements in advance of any US-Russia negotiations.

37. One of the more challenging aspects of a NATO nuclear posture review will be the need to ensure that NATO's requirements for deterrence are consistent with any arms control agreements that may be reached. The posture review should take account of any linkage established between further NATO reductions and reciprocal actions by Russia. In other words NATO needs to decide whether it needs certain systems itself, for its own reasons, irrespective of what is happening with Russian systems.

V. Future Prospects

38. In terms of nuclear policy the outcome of Lisbon was in the words of one senior NATO official, “enigmatic”. On balance the decisions reflected a conservative approach determined by the traditional interpretation of the requirements of deterrence and defence. While the addition of missile defence could be said to be an appropriate response to new threats it does not for several countries change the basic role of nuclear deterrence nor the existing posture. In effect therefore Lisbon confirmed the status quo of nuclear policy with a small gesture in the area of disarmament and arms control for the benefit of those who seek movement.

38a. The issue of further reductions in short range systems was made contingent on cooperation by Russia in achieving greater transparency and reducing its own stockpile, a great unknown.

38b. This and the language in the Concept means that there will be no change in existing arrangements any time soon. This brings us back full circle to the question of the replacement of aging DCA aircraft in Europe. The replacement for the aircraft in their conventional mission will go, or already is going, ahead. However the domestic situation in the basing countries will require the extension of life cycles of those platforms assigned the nuclear role. The question is for how long and at what cost?

38c. The comprehensive review should provide an opportunity to look at deterrence and defence across the board and to see in this context what NATO requires for its nuclear posture and where changes are possible. Changes in nuclear policy will depend on a variety of factors but first and foremost on the view by all members that their security interests are being met.

39. The outcome of Lisbon has indicated the gap that frequently exists between official decision making and the expectations of the non official outside world or at least that part of it that follows these issues. To an extent this is due to the singular focus of the advocacy groups who watch these matters closely but it is also due to a lack of appreciation of the workings of NATO and the heavy hand exerted by the principle of consensus.

NATO and Consensus

40. The influence of the NATO policy process and the relationship between collective and national decisions, particularly in the nuclear field is a dimension frequently overlooked in assessing the potential for change. Several factors influence NATO’s nuclear policy and decision making process and together explain the innate conservatism that governs attitudes to nuclear weapons. These factors include:

- The nature and characteristics of nuclear weapons themselves;

- The traditional caution attached to defence – a tendency reinforced by the new members emphasis on nuclear deterrence, collective defence and Article 5.
- The dynamics of nuclear policy where the voices of some members carry more weight than others via an informal hierarchy of the U.S and the other two nuclear powers, then the basing countries and then the others.
- The distraction of more immediately pressing problems.

41. The importance of competing priorities cannot be overstated. Compared with more pressing issues, particularly in the operational field, it is often easier to leave nuclear policy to one side. For several countries nuclear policy is not a problem. For others it is normally not important enough to rock the boat particularly in the collegiate atmosphere that permeates most NATO meetings. When there is a problem, acquiescence is gained through concessions elsewhere. Only when national positions are at stake due to domestic pressures will countries react and even then a NATO decision can be a convenient cover to ward off domestic criticism. All of these factors in their own way ensure that nuclear policy has a quiet life.

42. However this traditional way of doing things is now accompanied and increasingly challenged, by a parallel commitment on the part of several member countries to work towards the goal of reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons. These members believe that NATO should demonstrate its commitment by reducing their role in its own strategy and by playing a more active role in disarmament, arms control and non proliferation. For them the most important message NATO can send is what it says and does in its own nuclear policy.

Deterrence and Disarmament

43. Raising the disarmament banner almost always posits its relationship to defence and the respective priority to be accorded to either. Traditionally, defence as the hard side of security has taken precedence. Arms control has always been seen as a helpful adjunct that can reinforce, but cannot substitute for, defence in providing security. Disarmament will always take a back seat because those in favour rarely speak with the largest voice. Movement requires firm national leadership from one of the major powers. In view of the obduracy of France on nuclear policy and the multiple pressures bearing on the Obama Administration that leadership does not, for the moment, appear likely. However there are hopes that the ratification of new START will create the climate of trust and confidence that could facilitate further cooperation with Russia on arms control and confidence building.

44. In view of the changing international environment moreover, increasing concerns over proliferation, and increasing support for disarmament in influential circles, these deep seated attitudes may well change. Even among many of those placing hard security

first in the past, a view is growing that proliferation risks are now increasing to such an extent that the status quo is no longer the safe option that it perhaps once was. It is now important to look beyond the narrow approach of collective defence and adopt a broader approach in which the requirements of successful non-proliferation diplomacy have consequences for NATO's chosen deterrence posture.

45. As members of a multi national broadly based group the individual members of the European Leadership Network are perhaps well placed to convey this message and to help build this approach.