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‘Peace through strength’: Europe and NATO deterrence beyond the US Nuclear Posture Review

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With the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), Donald Trump’s administration put its stamp firmly on US nuclear weapons policy. The NPR describes an uncertain strategic environment characterized by a ‘return to great power competition’ in which the United States is perceived to have fallen behind its adversaries. Its underlying approach to deterrence in Europe, rooted in the logic of ‘peace through strength’, is designed to challenge head-on perceived Russian aggression and Moscow’s supposed willingness to engage in a ‘limited nuclear first-strike’. To do so, it argues, the United States needs to broaden its nuclear options and increase the diversity and flexibility of its forces. Primarily, it expands the role of nuclear deterrence to encompass ambiguously defined ‘non-nuclear strategic attacks’ as well as signalling US willingness to engage in limited nuclear retaliatory strikes. For this purpose, the NPR proposes developing and building new low-yield non-strategic nuclear weapons, including a new sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM) and modified submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) to offer further low-yield nuclear options in addition to the US B61 gravity bombs already forward-deployed in Europe. The NPR also signals that the Trump administration considers arms control with Russia unlikely in the near future, a point reinforced in October 2018 by the stated US intention to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, thus deepening the risks of a renewed nuclear arms race.¹

Much of the literature on Trump’s nuclear policy seeks to shed light on the degree of continuity or change with previous US administrations. For example, a number of former senior US policy-makers emphasized the NPR’s continuity, arguing that it was ‘in the mainstream of US nuclear policy’ as well as ‘prudent’ and ‘modest’ in its response to Russia.² Other commentators, meanwhile, criticized it as a bold departure from previous nuclear policy positions, asserting that it ‘hastens the rise of a

* The authors would like to thank Heather Williams, Ian Davis, Paul Ingram, Rishi Paul and the three anonymous reviewers for their detailed feedback, suggestions and support in the research and writing of this article.

¹ *Nuclear Posture Review 2018* (Washington DC: US Department of Defense, Feb. 2018).

² John R. Harvey, Franklin C. Miller, Keith B. Payne and Bradley H. Roberts, ‘Continuity and change in US nuclear policy’, *Real Clear Defense*, 7 Feb. 2018.

more dangerous world' by openly embracing nuclear competition.³ Ana Péczeli notes that while parts of the NPR align with previous positions on modernization and posture, it appears to 'put arms control measures on the back seat'.⁴ Heather Williams maintains, however, that changes in the NPR are 'more subtle', contending that the largest shift was the acceptance of a cross-domain definition of strategic stability.⁵

Absent from the assessments to date, however, has been an attempt to place nuclear policy developments within a fuller understanding of the deeper strategic direction being taken by the United States under its current conservative Republican leadership. This article will therefore offer a perspective that situates the Trump administration's nuclear policy within the legacy of the long-held Republican Party idea of 'peace through strength'. In this broader context, it will focus on European reactions to Trump's policy to demonstrate how the changes to US nuclear policy, though intended to bolster nuclear deterrence and assurance to allies, actually challenge widely held European attitudes on nuclear deterrence, disarmament and arms control. Since February 2018, a number of European political leaders have expressed concerns over the direction of US nuclear policy, ranging from disquiet over the US decision to develop new low-yield nuclear weapons through opposition to the US abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal and the announced withdrawal from the INF Treaty to wider frustrations over the state of transatlantic relations and deteriorating relations with Russia.⁶ Of

³ See e.g. Adam Mount, 'Trump's troubling nuclear plan', *Foreign Affairs*, 2 Feb. 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-02-02/trumps-troubling-nuclear-plan>; Kingston Reif, 'Trump seeks expanded nuclear capabilities', *Arms Control Association*, March 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-03/news/trump-seeks-expanded-nuclear-capabilities>. (Unless otherwise stated at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 3 Jan. 2019.)

⁴ Ana Péczeli, 'Continuity and change in the Trump administration's Nuclear Posture Review', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 20 Feb. 2018, <https://thebulletin.org/commentary/continuity-and-change-in-the-trump-administrations-nuclear-posture-review/>.

⁵ Heather Williams, 'Strategic stability, uncertainty and the future of arms control', *Survival* 60: 2, 2018, p. 51.

⁶ See e.g. German Federal Foreign Office, 'Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel on the publication of the US Nuclear Posture Review', press release, 4 Feb. 2018, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/Newsroom/bm-veroeffentlichung-us-nuklearstrategie/1433732>; David Herszenhorn, 'Europe vows to fight for Iran deal as US renews sanctions', *Politico*, 6 Aug. 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/federica-mogherini-europe-vows-to-fight-for-iran-deal-as-us-donald-trump-renews-sanctions/>; Maja Kocijancic, 'Statement by the spokesperson on the Treaty on

course, European views on nuclear weapons are not uniform. As this article shows, reactions have differed somewhat from state to state, and there has not been a completely unified view among European NATO members. Nonetheless, it is argued that the Trump administration's nuclear policy broadly challenges the more traditionally 'European' approaches to the issues of nuclear declaratory policy, faith in the deterrent value of existing nuclear weapons platforms, and the future of arms control.

We argue that to understand the NPR it should be considered in the context of the Trump administration's stated 'peace through strength' approach to foreign and security policy. This is a strand of conservative Republican foreign policy thinking that historically has been controversial with Europeans, has created a number of past challenges to the maintenance of NATO cohesion and has increased nuclear tensions with Russia. We begin by situating the Trump administration's nuclear policy within the context of the 'peace through strength' approach, analysing its underlying logic and considering why the approach concerns several European NATO members. We then consider the extent to which US nuclear policy now challenges common European understandings in three principal areas: nuclear declaratory policy, intra-alliance cooperation on modernization, and arms control. First, we contend that changes to US nuclear doctrine and declaratory policy that expand nuclear deterrence challenge European assumptions on the role of nuclear weapons in defending NATO. Second, we argue that the US decision on low-yield nuclear warheads and its implications for intra-alliance cooperation signal a lack of faith in the current forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe and could widen and accentuate controversial debates about the US commitment to Europe. Third, we argue that the apparent US rejection of arms control will widen the scope of discord with European leaders. We conclude by noting that European leaders need to assert a clear and credible vision to the Trump administration if they hope to forestall a renewed arms race and aspire to a world free from the threat of nuclear annihilation.

‘Peace through strength’ and the return to Great Power competition

Given Trump’s disparaging remarks about the alliance during his election campaign, early fears that his administration would spurn its NATO allies and become an unreliable partner in transatlantic security appeared well founded. President Trump was expected to be unpredictable and disruptive. Once in office, he appeared uninterested in tempering his views.⁷ He sent threatening letters to European leaders demanding they meet defence spending commitments, made critical or offensive off-the-cuff remarks and tweets in open criticism of allied leaders, and often surprised or contradicted even his own foreign policy advisers on the importance of transatlantic relations. It is tempting to regard the Trump administration as lacking strategic direction.⁸ There is certainly no shortage of accounts of the chaotic nature of decision-making in the Trump White House, along with claims that some advisers have been running a quiet resistance to the President’s more impetuous actions.⁹ There is, however, an important distinction to be made between the extraordinary personality and performance of the President himself and the more ordinary processes of executive-branch policy-making occurring within his administration. Like other strategic policy documents published by the Trump administration, the NPR and subsequent policy were created through an inter-agency process that involved the Pentagon and a number of senior officials, many of whom have served in previous Republican administrations. Similarly, the US decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty has been attributed to the influence of Trump’s third National Security Advisor, John Bolton, who has frequently advocated that US power be unconstrained by international treaties. Despite the fractious nature of internal relations and the shoot-from-the-hip style of the President himself, the administration has rooted its strategy in a discernible security policy maxim. The underlying logic of the Trump administration’s foreign and security policy, underpinning the NPR and the other security and defence strategy documents the administration has issued, is the idea of ‘peace through strength’. While Charles Krauthammer has characterized the Trump approach to foreign and security policy as ‘revolutionary’, the administration has publicly situated its policy within longstanding traditions of Republican presidencies.¹⁰ Not only did Trump assert in his

⁷ Joyce P. Kaufman, ‘The US perspective on NATO under Trump: lessons of the past and prospects for the future’, *International Affairs* 93: 2, March 2017, pp. 251–66.

⁸ Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich, ‘Does Donald Trump have a grand strategy?’, *International Affairs* 93: 5, Sept. 2017, pp. 1013–37.

⁹ See e.g. Bob Woodward, *Fear: Trump in the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

¹⁰ Charles Krauthammer, ‘Trump’s foreign policy revolution’, *Washington Post*, 26 Jan. 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/trumps-foreign-policy->

inaugural address on 20 January 2017 that ‘America First’ would be the fundamental core of his foreign policy; the administration also issued a short précis of its foreign policy stance on the newly refreshed White House website, including the significant declaration that ‘peace through strength’ would be the central guiding principle of that policy.¹¹ When the website was refreshed again in 2018, the statement became even clearer in its intent: ‘Rebuilding US deterrence to preserve peace through strength must be our nation’s top priority.’¹² This maxim of ‘peace through strength’ has been a mainstay of conservative Republican Party foreign policy thinking since at least Ronald Reagan’s presidency (1981–9), with deeper roots reaching back to the failed presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater in 1964.¹³ The idea of ‘peace through strength’ is that, although global peace and stability are the stated goals of US policy, they can only be achieved if the United States is in a position of perceived strength internationally. When adopted by an administration, this approach results in the United States striving to project the credibility of its power and resolve to allies and adversaries alike, partly through uncompromising and often nationalistic rhetoric, but also by signalling a buildup of military resources coupled with a demonstrable willingness to use them. In the 1980s, Reagan argued that his anti-Soviet rhetoric, deployment of nuclear cruise missiles to Europe, development of the Strategic Defense Initiative, willingness to threaten and use conventional force, and opposition to the nuclear freeze and disarmament movements were necessary steps towards achieving credible peace from a perceived position of strength. As he put it: ‘The reality is that we must find peace through strength.’¹⁴ While his approach did eventually lead to deeper nuclear arms reduction agreements with the Soviet Union, in particular the INF Treaty, it was a highly risky strategy that re-intensified the Cold War, deepened tensions in Europe and the Middle East, and led to proxy wars in Central America. Most significantly, it almost resulted in the outbreak

revolution/2017/01/26/c69268a6-e402-11e6-ba11-63c4b4fb5a63_story.html?utm_term=.46baf80754eb.

¹¹ ‘America First foreign policy’, White House website, accessed 20 Jan. 2017.

¹² ‘National security and defense’, White House website, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/national-security-defense/>

¹³ Trevor McCrisken, ‘Past is present: the future of conservative US foreign policy’, in Joel Aberbach and Gillian Peele, eds, *Crisis of conservatism?: The Republican Party, the conservative movement and American politics after Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 357–78.

¹⁴ Ronald Reagan, ‘Remarks at the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983’, in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1983*, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/30883b>

of nuclear war when NATO's Able Archer exercises in autumn 1983 were misread as preparation for an actual first strike against the Soviet Union, which consequently came close to launching a pre-emptive strike.¹⁵ The European experience of the consequences of the US 'peace through strength' approach in the 1980s, therefore, contribute to a wariness now of a President and an administration who are again drawing on the idea as they reformulate US nuclear strategy.

The Trump administration's clearest exposition of the 'peace through strength' concept came in its first National Security Strategy (NSS), issued on 18 December 2017, which featured the maxim 'preserve peace through strength' as one of its four 'pillars'. The document made plain that a fundamental element of this strategy would be 'rebuilding our military so that it remains pre-eminent, deters our adversaries, and if necessary, is able to fight and win'. Central to this enterprise are nuclear weapons, which, the administration declared, form 'the foundation of our strategy to preserve peace and stability by deterring aggression against the United States, our allies, and our partners'. The NSS called for 'significant investment' and 'modernization' to ensure Washington can 'maintain the credible deterrence and assurance capabilities provided by our nuclear Triad and by US theater nuclear capabilities deployed abroad'. In short, the NSS stressed that nuclear weapons 'remain the most significant existential threat to the United States' and suggested that the subsequent NPR would solidify the idea of 'peace through strength' in US nuclear forces.¹⁶

The NSS named Russia alongside China as Washington's main competitors for global influence, accusing both of challenging 'American power, influence and interests' and attempting to 'erode American security and prosperity'. Russia and China were listed alongside international terrorist organizations and so-called 'rogue states'—North Korea and Iran—as the greatest threats to US security.¹⁷ The administration's position on Russia was further reinforced in the National Defense Strategy of January 2018. Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis released an unclassified summary of this document and remarked publicly that 'great power competition, not terrorism, is now the

¹⁵ See Nate Jones and Thomas S. Blanton, *Able Archer 83* (New York: New Press, 2016); Taylor Browning, *1983: the world at the brink* (London: Little, Brown, 2018).

¹⁶ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017* (Washington DC: The White House, 2017), pp. 4, 25, 30.

¹⁷ *NSS 2017*, pp. 2–3; Chris Layne, 'The US–Chinese power shift and the end of the Pax Americana', *International Affairs* 94: 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 89–111; Bjorn Elias Mikalsen Gronnig, 'Operational and industrial military integration: extending the frontiers of the Japan–US alliance', *International Affairs* 94: 4, July 2018, pp. 755–72.

primary focus of US national security'.¹⁸ In this context, there was little surprise that the NPR also declared a 'return to great power competition', expressing the US perception that its nuclear capabilities have diminished relative to those of its adversaries.¹⁹ The Trump administration appeared to be responding assertively to the deeply negative security dynamic between the United States and Russia, echoed within NATO, that had grown during the Obama administration. President Trump's personal view of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, however, has often seemed in contradiction to the strategic assertion of US strength towards Moscow. During his election campaign Trump was highly complimentary about Putin, and although the continuing allegations of collusion with Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election have made him more circumspect at times, his public admiration for the Russian President stands in stark contrast to his criticism towards some allies. The Helsinki summit in July 2018 was overshadowed by Trump's controversial refusal during the joint press conference to confront Putin over Russian meddling in US elections. Although the two men expressed the belief that it was 'necessary to work together further to interact on the disarmament agenda', there was no tangible progress to relieve nuclear tensions.²⁰ Trump's announcement in October 2018 of the intention to withdraw from the INF Treaty took both America's allies and Moscow by surprise and suggested that Bolton's influence was in the ascendancy, reflected in Trump's willingness to accept a more critical line towards Russia.²¹ Putin had responded forcefully to Russia's negative characterization within US strategy documents, including the NPR, by announcing to the duma in March 2018 the development of three new strategic 'doomsday' nuclear weapons, showing video mock-ups suggesting the United States as their potential target. The Russian position indicates further the risk of a renewed nuclear

¹⁸ James N. Mattis, 'Remarks by Secretary Mattis on the National Defense Strategy', US Department of Defense, 19 Jan. 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1420042/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-on-the-national-defense-strategy/>.

¹⁹ *NPR 2018*, pp. 5–7.

²⁰ The White House, 'Remarks by President Trump and President Putin of the Russian Federation in joint press conference', Presidential Palace, Helsinki, 16 July 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-putin-russian-federation-joint-press-conference/>.

²¹ Julian Borger and Martin Pengelly, 'Trump says US will withdraw from nuclear arms treaty with Russia', *Guardian*, 20 Oct. 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/20/trump-us-nuclear-arms-treaty-russia>.

arms race, especially if the INF Treaty collapses and there is no extension to New START or a successor treaty.²²

The 'peace through strength' approach is also significant for Washington's NATO allies because Trump's assertion of US interests, strength and resolve has often been directed at them as well as adversaries. Trump's reluctance to affirm the US commitment to NATO collective defence, criticisms of the perceived inadequacy of allied defence spending, abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal despite concerted European lobbying, and instigation of a transatlantic trade war, raised fears that the 2018 Brussels NATO summit would be disastrous. The resulting summit declaration, forged despite Trump's attempts at disruption, did deepen the alliance's refocus on deterrence, begun at Warsaw in 2016, and contained bold measures to bolster NATO's capability to defend against the perceived Russian threat. NATO reaffirmed much of the Warsaw communiqué's language on nuclear deterrence and arms control, while expressing concern over the INF Treaty and recognizing the contribution of New START to international stability. The relatively hostile rhetoric Trump used towards allies at the NATO summit, however, contrasted starkly with his controversial friendliness towards Putin in Helsinki the following week.

The administration's 'peace through strength' approach and the attendant changes in US nuclear policy send signals to European allies that continue to cast doubt on NATO's mutually agreed policy. As Michaels and Williams note, 'Trump's approach to signalling is unique, and potentially destabilizing.'²³ The remainder of this article, therefore, analyses whether these changes achieve, from the perspective of Europeans in NATO, the Trump administration's stated goal of bolstering deterrence against Russia and grant the desired assurances to allies. A stronger alliance is not only synonymous with stronger nuclear deterrence, but requires intra-alliance nuclear cooperation and a convergence of priorities.²⁴ In the following three sections we analyse broad European reactions to US changes to nuclear declaratory policy, Washington's modernization plans and its approach to arms control, to suggest that the Trump administration is actually challenging alliance cohesion in its efforts to provide 'peace through strength'.

²² The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), entitled in full 'Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms', was signed in 2010 and entered into force the following year. It is due to expire 5 February 2021 but has an option to extend it to 2026.

²³ Jeffrey Michaels and Heather Williams, 'The nuclear education of Donald Trump', *Contemporary Security Policy* 38: 1, 2017, pp. 54–77.

²⁴ Stephan Frühling and Andrew O'Neil, 'Nuclear weapons and alliance institutions in the era of President Trump', *Contemporary Security Policy* 38: 1, 2017, pp. 47–53.

Expanding nuclear deterrence

One principal cause of concern in Europe is the proposals in the NPR that signal US willingness to engage in limited nuclear strikes and expand the circumstances of nuclear use. Such changes reflect the ‘peace through strength’ approach, in which credible nuclear deterrence requires all options to be on the table. However, it may have the unintended consequence of increasing nuclear risk, through inadvertently lowering the threshold for nuclear use; challenging allied consensus on nuclear deterrence and the need to gradually restrict the circumstances for nuclear use; and signalling a lack of US confidence in existing US nuclear options, undermining rather than enhancing their credibility. The NPR’s changes, made principally to counter a supposed Russian willingness to engage in ‘limited nuclear first use’, attempt to plug a perceived credibility ‘gap’ and ‘correct’ the ‘mistaken confidence that limited nuclear employment can provide a useful advantage’. Accordingly, the NPR outlines plans to develop new low-yield non-strategic nuclear weapons and signals US willingness to make limited retaliatory strikes.²⁵ Its view of Russian nuclear doctrine, however, is strongly contested by Bruno Tertrais: ‘Russia is not building new dedicated theatre-nuclear systems, and there is little evidence of new “low-yield” warheads; it does not have an “escalate to de-escalate” doctrine; and it is not practising the use of nuclear weapons in large-scale military exercises.’²⁶ Although NATO officials are sceptical about Russian intentions, Moscow’s official policy ‘reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and (or) its allies’ and also permits their use if Russia is faced with the ‘use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened’.²⁷ While Putin has since stated that Russia would only use nuclear weapons in a ‘retaliation strike’, critics will maintain that it is more reasonable to gauge Russia’s nuclear threshold by its multiple low-yield nuclear capabilities than to trust its declaratory statements.²⁸

The US administration argues that rather than enabling nuclear war-fighting, its new doctrine and new non-strategic nuclear weapons will actually raise the nuclear threshold ‘by convincing the

²⁵ NPR 2018, p. 53.

²⁶ Bruno Tertrais, ‘Russia’s nuclear policy: worrying for the wrong reasons’, *Survival* 60: 2, 2018, p. 35.

²⁷ Security Council of the Russian Federation, *Voennaya oktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii 2014* (Moscow, 2014), <http://scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>, para. 27.

²⁸ ‘Why would we want a world without Russia? Putin on Moscow’s nuclear doctrine’, *Russia Today*, 7 March 2018, <https://www.rt.com/news/420715-putin-world-russia-nuclear/>.

adversary that even limited use of nuclear weapons will be more costly'.²⁹ It is not unreasonable to conclude that Russia could be motivated by a similar logic. While intending to project strength by signalling a willingness to readily use nuclear weapons, nuclear postures reliant on limited nuclear strikes can send unintended signals. Indeed, if credible deterrence relies on the willingness to follow through on declaratory statements, as the NPR argues, then the new doctrine would entail the use of nuclear weapons earlier in a conflict if deterrence were to fail, thereby lowering the threshold for nuclear use. In the immediate aftermath of the review, public European responses were relatively muted, with the exception of the then German Foreign Minister's comments 'that the spiral of a new nuclear arms race has already been set in motion' by the NPR's apparent willingness to return to a doctrine based around tactical nuclear weapons.³⁰ Some east European states which feel most threatened by Moscow, such as Poland and the Baltic states, however, quietly welcomed the NPR's readiness to consider a limited nuclear strike to purportedly strengthen deterrence against Russia.³¹ The NPR makes wider changes to US declaratory policy by expanding nuclear deterrence to include a range of circumstances that the Obama administration sought to restrict. Similarly to the 2010 NPR, the 2018 document states that Washington would consider using nuclear weapons only 'in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, its allies, and partners'.³² It expands this definition, though, to include 'significant non-nuclear strategic attacks' against a range of targets. This moves away from the Obama administration's claims that it would use nuclear weapons only against nuclear threats and in 'a narrow range of contingencies' against conventional, chemical and biological threats from nuclear states. The new NPR expands this range to include attacks using emerging technologies, such as cyber, from both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states.³³

²⁹ *NPR 2018*, pp. II, 54.

³⁰ German Federal Foreign Office, 'Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel on the publication of the US Nuclear Posture Review'.

³¹ Artur Kacprzyk, 'Results of the US Nuclear Posture Review', *PISM Bulletin*, no. 29, 2018, p. 2; Lukasz Kulesa, *The 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review: a headache for Europe* (London: European Leadership Network, Feb. 2018), <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/the-2018-us-nuclear-posture-review-a-headache-for-europe/>.

³² *NPR 2018*, p. 21; *Nuclear Posture Review 2010* (Washington DC: US Department of Defense, April 2010), p. 16.

³³ *NPR 2018*, pp. 16, 21.

This shift has raised subsequent questions over the strength of US negative security assurances (NSAs) not to threaten non-nuclear weapon states with nuclear weapons. While the NPR reiterates that the United States will ‘not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-Nuclear Weapon States that are party to the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations’, this statement is qualified first by a preceding statement about ‘significant non-nuclear strategic attacks’ and second by the claim that Washington ‘reserves the right to make any adjustment in the [negative security] assurance that may be warranted by the evolution and proliferation of non-nuclear strategic attack technologies and US capabilities to counter that threat’.³⁴

The retention of a ‘right’ to apply nuclear deterrence to a range of future circumstances gives significantly increased value to nuclear weapons and challenges allies who wish to further tighten nuclear declaratory policy. At the 2018 NPT PrepCom discussion on disarmament and assurances, Germany stated: ‘It is timely to take a fresh look at [NSAs] and discuss whether they should be reaffirmed in order to boost the credibility and legitimacy of the nonproliferation regime.’³⁵

Similarly, the Netherlands asked what states could do ‘to reinforce the norm of non-use of nuclear weapons, core rationale of the NPT, for example by elaborating risk reduction measures, or by strengthening negative security assurances?’³⁶ As states look to make progress ahead of the NPT Review Conference in 2020, the NPR’s declaratory policy position closes down avenues for further progress on declaratory policy.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has sought to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in defence planning while maintaining that it will ‘remain a nuclear Alliance as long as nuclear weapons exist’. Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO re-emphasized deterrence and defence in

³⁴ *NPR 2018*, p. 21.

³⁵ ‘Statement by Ambassador Michael Biontino, Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament Geneva on Cluster 1: Nuclear disarmament and security assurances’, NPT PrepCom 2018, April 2018, http://statements.unmeetings.org/media2/18559478/germany-printer_20180426_104255.pdf.

³⁶ ‘Statement of the Netherlands, delivered by HE Robbert Gabriëlse, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament’, NPT PrepCom 2018, 23 April 2018, http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom18/statements/23April_Netherlands.pdf.

its declared position towards Moscow.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Alliance has been reluctant to reopen controversial debates on nuclear weapons. The NPR's changes to declaratory policy, however, call elements of NATO policy into question. First, the declared willingness to engage in limited nuclear strikes potentially contradicts the claim that NATO's 'nuclear force posture currently meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defence posture' and instead signals that this previous posture lacked credibility.³⁸ As Matthew Harries notes, far from signalling strength and resolve, the NPR presents a 'nervous' United States, uncertain in its existing ability to deter Russia.³⁹ Second, expanding the circumstances of nuclear use may undermine NATO statements that 'nuclear weapons are unique' and would 'fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict', by appearing to put nuclear weapons in the same category as other weapons under certain scenarios.⁴⁰ While the 2018 Brussels declaration reiterates these phrases verbatim, the continuity in NATO's language does not reflect the NPR's proposals to expand deterrence to a range of new scenarios. One former US official, Frank Rose, who broadly welcomed the review, called the NPR's language on non-nuclear strategic attacks a 'self-inflicted wound that will fester for some time'.⁴¹ NATO policy documents, including the 2018 declaration, note the importance of reducing both the number of nuclear weapons deployed in Europe and 'reliance on nuclear weapons in NATO strategy'. Conversely, Trump's 'peace through strength' nuclear posture appears to actively increase reliance on nuclear weapons. The NPR also raises questions of freedom of choice in British and French declaratory policies. While both countries share a strong attachment to nuclear deterrence and deep concerns about Russia, they also retain a commitment to reduce the salience of their nuclear weapons and harbour doubts about the 'peace through strength' approach, which appears to give nuclear weapons increased prominence

³⁷ NATO, Warsaw summit communiqué, July 2016,

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm, p. 54; Brussels summit declaration, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

³⁸ NATO, *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review*, 20 May 2012, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87597.htm, p. 8.

³⁹ Matthew Harries, 'A nervous Nuclear Posture Review', *Survival* 60: 2, 2018, pp. 55–7.

⁴⁰ Such language has been repeated in NATO policy statements including the 2010 *Strategic Concept*, the 2012 *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review* and the 2016 Warsaw communiqué.

⁴¹ Frank A. Rose, *Is the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review as bad as the critics claim it is?* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, April 2018).

in security doctrines.⁴² Since the NPR, the difference between British or French and US thinking on limited nuclear war has been brought into the open: for example, there is no mention of limited strikes in either UK or French nuclear doctrine.⁴³ The UK has felt forced to confirm that it remains ‘confident we have a credible and capable nuclear deterrent’, but also that it accepts the new US capabilities for a limited nuclear strike are ‘intended to enhance deterrence’ in ‘the worsening security situation of the world’.⁴⁴ If the United States pushes for assertive action and nuclear deployments early in a crisis to deter a limited nuclear strike, while European allies seek more restrained action, this could, as Lukasz Kulesa argues, allow Russia to exploit NATO confusion and capitalize on the political effects of this difference of opinion.⁴⁵ While changes in US policy are designed to bolster deterrence by projecting strength, they could inadvertently signal a lack of confidence on the part of the Trump administration in the established view that NATO can deter nuclear threats through *strategic* nuclear means, while deterring wider conventional, biological, chemical and emerging threats through conventional means. This positioning sits uneasily with general European opinion within NATO, which values US strategic nuclear forces as ‘the supreme guarantee of the security of Allies’, despite the NPR’s aim to increase assurance and project strength.⁴⁶

⁴² Paul Ingram, *Negative security assurances: the test of commitment to multilateral disarmament?*, (London: BASIC, June 2018), <http://box5466.temp.domains/~basicin1/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NSAs-Test-of-Commitment-to-Multilateral-Disarmament-WEB.pdf>

⁴³ See *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: a secure and prosperous United Kingdom* (London: HM Government, Nov. 2015); *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale* (Paris: Ministère de la Défense, Dec. 2017); Tiphaine de Champchesnel, *The United States, France and nuclear deterrence post NPR* (London: European Leadership Network, March 2018), <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/the-united-states-france-and-nuclear-deterrence-post-npr/>.

⁴⁴ The Secretary of State gave details regarding US nuclear weapons (House of Lords, Written Answers, 12 May 2018: WA 6247, 6248); see also de Champchesnel, *The United States, France and nuclear deterrence post NPR*.

⁴⁵ Kulesa, *The 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review*.

⁴⁶ NATO, Brussels summit declaration, 2018, p. 35.

Re-opening debates

The NPR expands on the United States' nuclear modernization plan initiated under President Obama. Significantly for Europe, the NPR continues the Life Extension Program to modernize B61 gravity bombs and, by 2024, replace the dual-capable aircraft (DCA) deployed in Europe, as well as introducing new plans to develop and deploy modified low-yield SLBMs and nuclear-tipped SLCMs. The Trump administration emphasized these non-strategic nuclear weapons for the European theatre, closely linked to the NPR's call for 'tailored' and 'flexible' deterrence, and the 2018 NATO declaration gave stronger emphasis to NATO's reliance on forward-deployed nuclear weapons.⁴⁷ The articulation of these plans within a 'peace through strength' approach, however, presents a number of potential problems for intra-alliance politics on modernization. The divisive nature of Trump's presidency exacerbates tensions and could re-open difficult discussions among those host states where scepticism persists over the utility of forward-deployed nuclear weapons. US dependence on low-yield nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War has been troubling for many European states. Especially for those that readily embraced President Obama's Prague Agenda and those where domestic anti-nuclear sentiments are strong, such as Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway, increasing dependence under Trump's administration exacerbates internal alliance divisions.⁴⁸

Questions remain over whether host states will maintain the DCA required for forward-deployed nuclear weapons. Many European host parliaments, for example in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, remain apprehensive about the long-term economic, political, diplomatic and security implications. For example, during the last NATO Strategic Concept Review, five NATO states, including three hosts, advocated removal of the B61s.⁴⁹ The NPR lays a strong emphasis on burden-sharing, so lacklustre European support could have a negative effect on relations with the United

⁴⁷ NATO, Brussels summit declaration, 2018, p. 35; Warsaw communiqué, 2016, p. 53.

⁴⁸ See Emil Dall, *A balancing act: NATO States and the Nuclear Ban Treaty*, issue brief (London: European Leadership Network, July 2017), <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/170721-Nuclear-Ban-Treaty-Issues-Brief.pdf>; International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), *One year on: European attitudes toward the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: a YouGov poll of four NATO states*, July 2018, http://www.icanw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/YouGov_ICAN_EUNATOTPNW2018.pdf.

⁴⁹ David Brunnstrom and Arshad Mohammed, 'NATO debates future of nuclear arms in Europe', Reuters, April 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-nuclear/nato-debates-future-of-nuclear-arms-in-europe-idUSTRE63L2UH20100422>.

States, especially ranged alongside internal disputes over defence spending and renewed US demands that NATO members meet their financial commitments. Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey currently use the F-16, while Germany uses the Tornado for the nuclear role. Italy and the Netherlands have decided to replace their DCA with the F-35, while in other countries decisions are still pending.

It has been suggested that European populism and public opposition to nuclear weapons could endanger replacement, despite continuing government-level support for the nuclear mission.⁵⁰ For example, the Belgian parliament passed a resolution in 2015 asking the government to ‘take resolute steps towards nuclear disarmament . . . to make the Belgian territory completely free of nuclear weapons’.⁵¹ Similarly, in 2013 the Netherlands parliament passed a resolution preventing the purchase of nuclear-capable versions of the new fighter jet, although the government ignored it. The centrist Democrat 66 party in the current Dutch coalition has stated its opposition to a nuclear role for the new F-35.⁵² Germany has been reluctant politically to host the B61s and Berlin has been seeking clarification over whether the Eurofighter, rather than American F-35, could be certified for the nuclear role.⁵³ This political opposition reflects broader public wariness. In a recent poll of host state publics it was clear that significant percentages support removal of nuclear arms: 56 per cent in the Netherlands, 57 per cent in Belgium, 65 per cent in Italy and 70 per cent in Germany.⁵⁴ The opposition to the DCA mission in host states contrasts with the eagerness to bolster deterrence on the part of some eastern allies, such as Poland, where defence officials have advocated making their F-16s nuclear-capable.⁵⁵ It is true that host-state governments have broadly maintained the nuclear missions against the grain of sceptical publics and parliaments. The rise of populist parties, however,

⁵⁰ David Gevartar, *Could European populism go nuclear on NATO?* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, July 2018), <https://www.cfr.org/blog/could-european-populism-go-nuclear-nato>.

⁵¹ ICAN, *One year on*.

⁵² Dick Zandee and Sico van de Meer, *Trump’s Nuclear Posture Review: a new rift between Europe and the US?* (The Hague: Clingendael, Feb. 2018).

⁵³ Andrea Shalal, ‘Germany presses US on potential Eurofighter nuclear role’, Reuters, June 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-germany-military-fighter/germany-presses-u-s-on-potential-eurofighter-nuclear-role-idUKKBN1JG1K1>.

⁵⁴ ICAN, *One year on*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Ulrich Kühn, *Preventing escalation in the Baltics: a NATO playbook* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2018), https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Kuhn_Baltics_INT_final_WEB.pdf, p. 33.

suggests that the ‘establishment’ consensus is vulnerable to political change, and the prevailing—and fragile—agreement on forward-deployed nuclear weapons could shift as a result.

The US suggestion that forward-deployed nuclear weapons could be used in a limited ‘non-strategic’ nuclear strike may also deepen opposition. Until now, forward-deployed gravity bombs have been regarded as largely ‘political weapons’ on several months’ notice of use. Nevertheless, Russia has used the modernization of the B61 and DCA to criticize NATO, arguing that the F-35’s stealth capability may deliver a new option to penetrate deep into Russian airspace, thus transforming them from ‘political’ to ‘battlefield weapons’.⁵⁶ Hans Kristensen has noted that host states could interpret the B61-12’s accuracy and penetration improvements as representing an effort to increase the usability of nuclear weapons and therefore an increase in NATO’s reliance on nuclear weapons within US doctrine.⁵⁷ The NPR calls on NATO to ‘enhance the realism of training and exercise programs to ensure the Alliance can effectively integrate nuclear and non-nuclear operations, if deterrence fails’.⁵⁸ Host states where anti-nuclear sentiment is strong risk aggravating opposition by engaging in such training if it is represented as practising nuclear war-fighting, even though the NPR goes to some lengths to assure that is not the intention. Similarly, states that do not wish to see any increase in tensions with Russia may resist such training, especially with dual-capable systems. In the past, training exercises involving nuclear weapons or dual-capable systems have been seen as provocative, have raised tensions and have led to dangerous misinterpretations, as noted earlier with regard to Able Archer in the 1980s. Given the current level of tensions with Moscow, an emphasis on the DCA mission, while conceived of by the United States as a projection of strength, could inadvertently highlight European opposition to the Trump approach and lead to dangerous miscalculations about intent.

The NPR’s plans to develop a low-yield SLBM and a new SLCM also affect wider European debates on nuclear deterrence. These plans are designed to plug a supposed ‘credibility’ gap and project

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, ‘Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Non-proliferation and Arms Control Mikhail Ulyanov’s Interview with the Interfax news agency, December 19, 2017’, Dec. 2017, http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2998923?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

⁵⁷ Hans M. Kristensen, ‘B61-12 guided nuclear bomb’, in Steve Andreason, Isabelle Williams, Brian Rose, Hans M. Kristensen and Simon Lunn, *Building a safe, secure, and credible NATO nuclear posture* (Washington, DC: Nuclear Threat Initiative, Jan. 2018), p. 18.

⁵⁸ *NPR 2018*, p. 36.

strength; but they unintentionally signal that the United States doubts the ability of the existing B61 and the proposed air-launched LRSO (Long Range Stand Off) cruise missile to provide a non-strategic nuclear deterrent, and also contrast with broader NATO sentiments. Doubts over deterrence requirements could prompt a host state to reconsider its participation in nuclear sharing, especially if public sentiment supporting the Nuclear Ban Treaty or opposition to Trump's presidency continues to build. A recent ICAN/YouGov poll shows strong host-state public support for the Ban Treaty (66 per cent in the Netherlands and Belgium, 71 per cent in Germany and 72 per cent in Italy).⁵⁹ Conversely, greater European attachment to existing forward-deployed nuclear weapons may continue to develop as a way of ensuring the US commitment to Europe. The 2018 declaration, for example, strengthened NATO's language on forward-deployed weapons. It stated clearly that its nuclear deterrence posture 'relies on United States nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe and on capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies concerned', whereas previous statements such as the Warsaw communiqué stated only that the deterrence posture relied 'in part' on forward-deployed weapons.⁶⁰ It is unclear whether this change in language originated with the US or host states. Nevertheless, host states must continue to reconcile publics inclined to favour disarmament leaning publics with their nuclear deterrence commitments.

It is possible, though relatively unlikely, that the 'America First' rhetoric and Trump's treatment of allies could prompt Europeans to seek their own nuclear deterrent. The recent 'Euro-nuke' debate is a telling indication of European anxieties over the US commitment to NATO. After the 2018 summit, a *Welt am Sonntag* article questioned whether the US nuclear guarantee was credible and prompted discussion within German newspapers and security publications about the idea of a German or pan-European nuclear weapon. Few German politicians support the idea, and it would require Germany, one of the European states most inclined to favour nuclear disarmament, to leave the NPT. The proposition nevertheless highlights the delicate and somewhat contradictory intersections between European reluctance to rely on nuclear weapons, opposition to Trump's 'America First' rhetoric, a lack of confidence in the 'peace through strength' approach, and anxiety over the credibility of the US security guarantee.⁶¹

⁵⁹ ICAN, *One year on*, p. 4.

⁶⁰ NATO, Brussels summit declaration, 2018, p. 35; Warsaw communiqué, 2016, p. 53.

⁶¹ Doug Bandow, 'The case for a European nuke: why the continent needs its own deterrent', *Foreign Affairs*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2017-03-27/case-european-nuke>.

The NPR could revive dormant but unresolved debates on the utility of low-yield nuclear weapons in Europe. While long-term effects are uncertain, reservations about nuclear sharing persist in host-state populations and parliaments, and now intersect with wider European concerns about Trump's leadership. If a host state decided to quit sharing arrangements, this would have profound symbolic effect on the unity of NATO on nuclear issues. Rather than providing peace and stability, the US attempt to project strength through non-strategic nuclear weapons could cast doubt on the credibility of forward-deployed nuclear weapons and deepen tension with allies.

Lacking leadership in arms control

In line with many of President Trump's statements, the NPR reflects little interest in engaging in a serious arms control agenda in Europe. As Williams notes, 'this is unsurprising: arms control is typically associated with limiting capabilities, while this NPR is about hedging'.⁶² However, it did not reject arms control outright, instead placing faith in the idea that through projecting strength the United States can bring Russia to the negotiating table, much as Trump would argue has been achieved with North Korea. While this is understandable, given the wider US articulation of a 'peace through strength' foreign policy, the perceived scepticism towards multilateralism and arms control implies a fundamental criticism of the basis of nuclear ordering and an apparent rejection of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts that are troubling for European allies.⁶³

When the Trump administration's NPR was released, commentators expressed concern that it appeared to reject international arms control and failed to address the issue of disarmament. Although the review notes that arms control can be helpful in 'decreasing misperception and miscalculation; and avoiding destabilizing nuclear arms competition', there is not a single mention of Article VI of the NPT, which had been explicitly referred to throughout the 2010 NPR.⁶⁴ As Oliver Meier notes, the NPR raises nuclear disarmament only once and then to dismiss it, saying it would 'require a fundamental transformation of the world political order', and that this has not 'taken place, nor is it emerging'.⁶⁵ Even if Washington did not wish to project a lack of commitment to multilateral efforts, its use of language compared with the 2010 NPR has the effect of signalling that

⁶² Williams, 'Strategic stability', p. 50.

⁶³ Oliver Meier, *The US Nuclear Posture Review and the future of nuclear order* (London: European Leadership Network, Feb. 2018), https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/the-u-s-nuclear-posture-review-and-the-future-of-nuclear-order/?mc_cid=5fae6037b6&mc_eid=be98d911ae; Kulesa, *The 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review*.

⁶⁴ NPR 2018, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Meier, *The US Nuclear Posture Review*.

Trump's administration has limited interest in arms control and wider disarmament compared with Obama's. A continued US commitment to disarmament structures and agreements is implied; while the 2018 document refers to a new 'conditions'-based approach if the US is to make further reductions in its nuclear arsenal, it outlines no roadmap for creating the conditions to make further cuts, instead asking European allies to consider what steps could be taken at the 2018 NPT PrepCom. It concludes that 'further progress [on arms control] is difficult to envisage', given accusations of Russian non-compliance with existing arrangements, and that 'Moscow must understand that the United States will not forever endure Russia's continuing non-compliance'. Indeed, it asserts that unless circumstances change, 'concluding further agreements with [Russia] would indicate a lack of consequences for its non-compliance and thereby undermine arms control'.⁶⁶

Arms control has deteriorated further since the NPR with Trump's announced intention to 'terminate' the INF Treaty. The demise of this treaty could result in 'a new age of nuclear tension in Europe by setting off a domino effect in disrupting strategic arms control for the foreseeable future, impacting the likelihood of negotiating a New START successor treaty or any other new arms control agreements'.⁶⁷ The result would be no mutually agreed caps on the world's largest nuclear arsenals for the first time since 1972. Russia may hold out for progress on strategic arms control, or new asymmetric arms control involving ballistic missile defence. As Williams notes, while the NPR expands the definition of strategic stability beyond the nuclear level to include deterring 'non-nuclear strategic threats', problematically it does not expand the US definition of arms control beyond strategic offensive nuclear weapons.⁶⁸ Herein lie the great risks involved in the US pursuit of a nuclear posture rooted in the notion of 'peace through strength'—that the steps taken to demonstrate that strength, to allies and adversaries alike, end up pushing tensions and mistrust so far that moving to the 'peace' side of the equation becomes increasingly unlikely.

The US approach to the INF Treaty and wider arms control has certainly become a point of discord within NATO. Before the US announcement, Europeans were unanimous in their calls to resolve the issues surrounding the INF Treaty and ensure a future for strategic arms control. Yet they had refrained from placing blame on Moscow to the same extent that the United States did. At the NPT 2018 PrepCom, the EU encouraged 'an active dialogue' between the US and Russia over Moscow's

⁶⁶ NPR 2018, p. 74.

⁶⁷ Maxwell Downman, *Changing nuclear weapons policy in the Trump era: implications for Europe* (London: BASIC, Dec. 2017), <http://box5466.temp.domains/~basicin1/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Downman-NATO-Nukes-final---WEB-1.pdf>

⁶⁸ Williams, 'Strategic stability', p. 51.

INF compliance ‘to ensure the full and verifiable implementation of their commitments under this Treaty which is crucial for Europe’s security’.⁶⁹ The 2018 NATO declaration toughened the stance of the majority of European states, noting: ‘Allies believe that, in the absence of any credible answer from Russia on [their] new missile, the most plausible assessment would be that Russia is in violation of the Treaty’; but it stopped short of condemning Russia for the violations. In the light of this approach, President Trump’s INF announcement left Europeans caught off guard as he walked away from a growing NATO consensus on the issue without consultation.⁷⁰

Europeans have broadly opposed Trump’s decision, while urging the United States to resolve compliance concerns within the confines of the treaty. As the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stated, ‘we have to make sure the baby is not thrown out with the bath water’; and the French President Emmanuel Macron called on ‘all the parties to avoid any hasty unilateral decisions, which would be regrettable’. The UK’s initial response differed from the majority: Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson came out in support of the US decision, saying that Russian non-compliance was ‘making a mockery’ of the treaty. Since then, the Dutch government has stated that it has independently confirmed Russian non-compliance, and in November 2018 Germany successfully persuaded Washington to give Russia 60 days to come into compliance before initiating the process of withdrawal. Although they broadly acknowledge Russian non-compliance, European leaders remain wary of abandoning the treaty and pursuing a strategy of accusation and confrontation that could shut down dialogue and cooperation. There is a concern that the Trump administration strategy will result in the United States being blamed for the demise of the treaty, with subsequent knock-on effects for the arms control and non-proliferation regime.

For European states wary of nuclear modernization and cognisant of the need to reduce nuclear arsenals, there are further concerns about arms control strategies that rely on increasing nuclear threats and risks. For example, the NPR’s sole stated arms control strategy relies upon the introduction of the SLCM to ‘provide the necessary incentive for Russia to negotiate seriously a reduction of its non-strategic nuclear weapons, just as the prior Western deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe led to the 1987 INF Treaty’. This strategy clearly puts faith in

⁶⁹ ‘Statement by Mr Jacek Bylica, Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-proliferation, European External Action Service, on behalf of the European Union’, NPT PrepCom 2018, April 2018, http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom18/statements/23April_EU.pdf.

⁷⁰ Eli Watkins and Maegan Vasquez, ‘Trump threatens nuclear buildup until other nations “come to their senses”’, CNN, 24 Oct. 2018.

Reagan's 'peace through strength' strategy of the 1980s, but also entails a number of similar risks. The multiple justifications given for the SLCM potentially confuse any signalling that the United States is willing to negotiate it away. Similarly, the United States may struggle to coax Russia into compliance across launch platforms from sea to ground. Washington rightly realized that developing a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) would have explicitly violated the INF Treaty; but, more importantly, Europeans have no appetite for a twenty-first-century rerun of the 1980s Pershing missile crisis that caused substantial public and political opposition in host countries. A US show of strength in this respect might also be interpreted by Moscow not as an invitation to negotiate but as an attempt to gain strategic and military advantage. As both the United States and Russia believe their nuclear weapons developments are equalizing an unequal strategic balance, further weapons developments could heighten rather than reduce nuclear tensions and deepen the potential for a renewed arms race. The Russian Foreign Ministry has publicly interpreted the US development of a new SLCM and SLBM as introducing additional 'battlefield weapons' that represent a 'dramatic lowering of the threshold conditions [that] can provoke a nuclear missile war even in a low-intensity conflict'.⁷¹ Notwithstanding Russian nuclear modernization, the current crisis has ignited concerns among European policy-makers that Russia will decide to lower its own nuclear threshold or develop counter-capabilities in response to the United States. The time-lag in nuclear modernization responses is notable. Russia portrayed its newly unveiled nuclear weapons in 2018 as a response to the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, which took place some 16 years earlier. The NPR's arms control strategy, relying as it does on weapons development today, could have further unpredictable consequences for strategic stability many years down the line. While not related to arms control strictly speaking, Trump's decision to decertify the Iran nuclear deal and re-impose sanctions on Tehran reveals the seriousness of potential disagreements within NATO over arms control and non-proliferation. European allies remain wedded to the deal, opening up a significant transatlantic rift. The unanimity and strength of European opinion on the Iran deal and the INF Treaty reflects a rejection of the US approach, and of the idea that the projection of strength and the use of threat can force a better deal.

⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 'Comment by the Information and Press Department on the new US Nuclear Posture Review', March 2018, http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3054726?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

European governments that welcomed Obama's Prague Agenda of step-by-step disarmament and supported his stance on arms control and non-proliferation have been troubled by the US approach to arms control following the NPR, notwithstanding the realization shared by all NATO members that in recent years 'the conditions for achieving disarmament have not become more favourable'.⁷² The NPR's emphasis on extended nuclear deterrence as a 'cornerstone of US non-proliferation efforts' that enables allies to 'forgo independent nuclear weapons capabilities' seems out of step with the understanding in many European states of the difficulties facing the non-proliferation regime.⁷³ Similarly, public pressure to sustain the Ban Treaty throws lack of progress on the step-by-step agenda into even sharper relief. The Trump administration's more adversarial approach to nuclear diplomacy can certainly be construed as a turn away from non-proliferation and disarmament, in contrast to the previous US administration. More widely, the NPR signals a strategic willingness to rely on deterrence more than non-proliferation or arms control. It appears to reflect a US willingness to accept a world in which nuclear deterrence has an expanded role alongside an unwillingness to lead on arms control and in wider steps to mitigate nuclear risks. Yet a willingness to ultimately pursue arms control should be inherent in a foreign policy approach that views the need to establish strength through power projection as a precondition for the creation of peace.

Conclusion

This article has shown that changes to US nuclear policy following the NPR have complicated NATO dynamics and damaged NATO cohesion on nuclear issues. There is a real risk that the US 'peace through strength' approach will continue to deepen transatlantic divisions and the existing arms control crisis. While US nuclear policy clearly represents an attempt within the Trump administration's 'peace through strength' foreign policy to bolster deterrence against Russia and provide increased assurance to allies, it may have unintended consequences. In Europe, changes in US policy are being interpreted as signalling a lowering threshold for nuclear use and a willingness to engage in a destabilizing arms race, and projecting a disregard for consensual decision-making. Such conclusions are felt even more keenly in view of the President's adversarial and often erratic behaviour in his interactions with European leaders, and the administration's increased willingness to openly criticize its allies. Although NATO continues to be resilient and has long experience in bridging US and varying European perspectives, for the reasons explored in this article Washington is finding it difficult to persuade Europeans to give vigorous support to a 'peace through strength' approach to nuclear issues. Europeans remain uneasy about proposals to expand nuclear deterrence

⁷² NATO, Brussels summit declaration, 2018, p. 42.

⁷³ *NPR 2018*, p. 70.

to cover non-nuclear threats and to use limited nuclear strikes to control escalation. Trump administration plans that increase the salience of non-strategic nuclear weapons in NATO planning revive unresolved discussions about European contributions to NATO's nuclear deterrence capabilities that could in turn undermine the credibility of its deterrent value in the long term. Finally, the Trump administration's strategy on arms control, which relies on increasing the nuclear threat, has deepened tensions with European allies. While nuclear cooperation has historically been a way of managing alliance relations and creating NATO cohesion, the Trump administration's 'peace through strength' approach has damaged trust within the alliance. If such an approach fails to command broad European support, promotes neither NATO cohesion nor trust in the alliance, and does not reinforce security assurances, while creating risks in arms control and non-proliferation, its success must be considered questionable, to say the least.

While European states' responses have been relatively muted over the first two years of the Trump administration, as their transatlantic ally and security guarantor has diverged from the post-Cold War nuclear consensus and implemented a strategy designed to advocate US strength, dissenting opinions are increasingly being expressed—especially regarding arms control. At the same time, European governments are concerned about contesting US policy across a range of areas, given a President who is highly critical of his allies and their sympathy with the objective of facing up to Russia—even if they disagree with details of the methods espoused by Washington and are perhaps confused by the mixed messages that come from the Trump administration and in particular from President Trump himself. Yet the issues outlined in this article, if not tackled, will only grow, and will have impacts on NATO's capability to deal with future challenges. NATO has historically provided an institutional framework for allies to raise nuclear concerns and seek consensus-based decisions with Washington, as well as to influence US policy. Europeans can use these mechanisms to address their concerns, strengthen the alliance and project a vision of a Europe based upon cooperative security and an appreciation of the positive value of restraint and arms control.

If the West and Russia have already entered a new Cold War, one characterized by a heightened risk of miscalculation and misperception rather than an ideologically driven conflict, there are significant dangers for Europeans in policies that lower the nuclear threshold, expand the circumstances of nuclear use and endanger arms control. These bring into being nuclear insecurities not seen for over 30 years. When the Reagan administration adopted a 'peace through strength' strategy in the early 1980s, this too resulted initially in increased tensions in Europe, not only with nervous allies but also, provocatively, with its Soviet adversary, and greatly increased fear of nuclear war among publics. The Reagan administration, however, did move from the projection of strength to negotiating peace, and Reagan agreed with Mikhail Gorbachev that 'nuclear war cannot be won and

must never be fought'. The two leaders built a relationship of trust as they engaged in an ambitious arms control agenda to reduce tensions and move towards a more peaceful and cooperative relationship. Trump and Putin claimed this same objective in Helsinki but did little to convince observers they were serious, and developments around the INF have raised grave doubts about this mutual objective. Yet nuclear restraint, risk reduction and arms control could rebuild trust and confidence between the United States, NATO and Russia. This approach would provide a better route for the US to alleviate Great Power conflict and reassure European allies—the pressing issues that US nuclear policy seeks to solve. It is an approach that would also demonstrate real strength in US purpose and intent, and ultimately lead to more genuine opportunities for peace. In this context it is the responsibility of European allies to express their own vision and build a new European nuclear consensus, based on decreasing nuclear risks despite international political tensions. Early action by European governments to clarify an approach not based solely on the projection of perceived 'strength' could clearly benefit longer-term cohesion in NATO and provide for more credible and sustainable European security.