

Decisive Response: A New Nuclear Strategy for NATO

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A declining power can be a dangerous one. Take Russia, whose president, Vladimir Putin, has been engaging in external aggression to excite the patriotism of the Russian people and thus remain popular despite an economy ravaged by low energy prices, corruption and sanctions. Yet even as Russia threatens international peace and Western interests, its weak economy has caused it to fall far behind NATO militarily. Russia's defence spending is about one-tenth of NATO's;¹ and with energy prices unlikely to rise, this disparity will persist. Moreover, Russia cannot compete with the West in digital technology, which is now the main multiplier of military strength. Knowing this, the Russians have chosen an asymmetric strategy, involving hybrid warfare, deniable intervention, cyber war and nuclear intimidation. They have preyed on neighbouring states by infiltrating paramilitary forces, using agents and proxies, holding menacing military exercises and attacking computer networks; and they have hijacked social media to undermine Western confidence and cohesion. The West has struggled to answer this Russian strategy.

Within its asymmetric strategy, Russia also maintains a preponderance of regional (non-strategic) nuclear weapons, which it is likely to increase through deployments of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), legalised

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by US withdrawal from the INF Treaty. Nuclear weapons have always been a 'cheap' option to make up for deficiencies in conventional forces, and Russia has made them a top priority. Russian spending on nuclear weapons increased by 66% between 2010 and 2016, from \$5.6 billion in 2010 to \$9.3bn in 2016.²

The combination of Russian hybrid warfare and increased reliance on nuclear weapons is dangerous for Western interests and international security. Unlike the Cold War threat of a large-scale, mechanised Soviet offensive, lower-grade Russian aggression could confound NATO decision-making, which is already complicated by the task of finding consensus among 29 members with diverse perspectives and concerns. In contrast, Russian decisions are made by one man. Would all the allies agree that reports of slowly increasing numbers of civilian-clothed Russian paramilitary personnel in Russian-speaking districts of a member state meet the standard for invoking the Article V common-defence provision of the North Atlantic Treaty? What if social-media sources (with Russian fingerprints) were reporting that ethnic Russians in those districts were being oppressed by local security? What if Moscow declared a humanitarian crisis, speciously appealed to the UN for peacekeepers and, in the meantime, 'temporarily' augmented paramilitaries with significant numbers of regular troops, giving Russia local military advantage? Would NATO do anything more than condemn, deplore and warn?

If NATO military commanders were to advise their political superiors that the forcible removal of Russian forces from a member's territory might dictate striking critical military targets in Russia, this would raise the spectre of Russian escalation up to and including use of non-strategic nuclear weapons, in which Russia has a growing advantage. In this way, Russia could be tempted to use the threat of nuclear war as a means of extending its control over Russian-speaking regions. Though such a gambit would be risky for Russia, Moscow would have reasonable grounds to doubt NATO's unity and decisiveness. NATO must seek to erase any such doubt. For that it needs a more credible nuclear-deterrence doctrine.

The role of nuclear weapons

Russia has intimated it would use nuclear weapons first if attacked by NATO conventional forces. The spectre of NATO aggression against Russia

has been concocted by Putin to seal his compact with the Russian people, whereby they accept autocracy in return for a strong and secure country. Why, if Putin invented this threat, should NATO worry about Russia responding with nuclear weapons to aggression that NATO has no intention of committing?

Were Russia to use force against a NATO member – say, one of the Baltic states – it would likely rely on air bases, weapons, sensors, command and control and back-up forces stationed *in Russia*. While it might not need to rely on these capabilities at first, it *would* need them if and when NATO began to reinforce its forward forces. Therefore, in order to fulfil its obligation to defend every member, NATO might need to strike military targets within Russia. Conversely, if the Russians believed they could operate from sanctuaries such as Kaliningrad, the Kola Peninsula or Crimea, they might be more inclined to take risks in waging hybrid or even conventional warfare against NATO. With Russia having asserted that it might use nuclear weapons if attacked, NATO must dissuade the Russians from believing that they can deter NATO from striking operationally critical military targets wherever they are located.

While it is clear that Russian doctrine entails first use of nuclear weapons if attacked by NATO, it has sent mixed signals about how severe the threat would have to be to warrant such a response. Currently, Russia's declaratory policy is that it would use nuclear weapons first if the very existence of the state depended on it.³ At other times, it has more boldly suggested that conventional aggression against Russia on a scale critical to national security could trigger nuclear escalation. The Kremlin has adopted the euphemism 'escalate in order to de-escalate' to articulate its threat to use nuclear weapons, which could include first use even if the survival of the Russian state were not at stake. Rather than trying to read the tea leaves of Russians' changing first-use policy, NATO should take as given that striking targets on Russian territory could heighten the danger of nuclear war. It follows that deterring Russian nuclear first use is paramount for NATO's ability to deter Russian conventional aggression.

Yet NATO's nuclear-deterrent policy remains vague and puzzling. The current official formulation, first set out in the 2010 Strategic Concept adopted

before the new Russian threat emerged, is that NATO needs an 'appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional weapons' to deter aggression. This policy contemplates nuclear use only in 'extremely remote' circumstances.⁴ In 2012, the NATO Deterrence and Defence Posture Review reiterated this basic policy, adding a reference to negative-security assurances for adherents of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and noting the complementary role of missile defences as part of the 'appropriate mix'.⁵ More recently, at its 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO warned that Russian use of nuclear weapons would 'fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict', and stated that NATO has the 'capabilities and resolve' to impose unacceptable costs in response to threats to the 'fundamental security' of a member nation.⁶ This formulation implies that NATO is hesitant to say it would retaliate with nuclear weapons and, indeed, could be indecisive about nuclear retaliation in the event – a stance that is hardly conducive to deterrence. It is high time that NATO fix this problem.

As a rule, deterrence policy should be communicated pointedly enough to alter an enemy's calculus, especially when it comes to nuclear war. Given Russia's general belligerence, its first-use threat and its nuclear-weapons modernisation programme, for NATO to say only that it needs nuclear weapons to deter aggression in 'extremely remote' circumstances is worse than inadequate: it's risky. Lack of clarity on using nuclear weapons may preserve maximum flexibility for NATO's political leaders, but it may also imply a lack of will or consensus.

NATO's nuclear strategy is the critical missing piece in its otherwise strong, step-by-step response to the danger of Russian aggression. Specifically, NATO has strengthened its resilience against hybrid threats by creating assistance teams to support states under this sort of pressure. It has ramped up cyber defence, said that a cyber strike could trigger an Article V response, created a cyber-operations centre and warned of cyber retaliation. Battalion-sized NATO 'battlegroups' are deployed on the territory of particularly exposed allies to oppose Russian paramilitary aggression and prompt a robust response should Russia send in combat forces. A highly ready joint task force has been created, and the NATO Response Force has been strengthened. Moreover, the Alliance is improving its readiness,

mobility and command and control so that it can reinforce its positions, gain an advantage and defeat Russian forces if required.⁷ More needs to be done in the realm of conventional defence, but NATO's deterrent posture has significantly improved during the past five years.

Though necessary, all these measures could prove insufficient if NATO is deterred by Russia's nuclear-first-use threats from striking critical Russia-based military assets with conventional forces where needed to avoid a NATO defeat. For its overall defence strategy to successfully deter Russian aggression with the potential to escalate, NATO needs a new nuclear strategy. This raises some prickly questions for the Alliance: how should it explain why it needs nuclear weapons? What doctrine should govern why, when and how these weapons could be used? How should NATO's nuclear weapons fit into its overall defence strategy? What capabilities are needed, including theatre and strategic deterrent forces, and who should possess them? How should NATO's nuclear strategy tie into global strategic stability? What, if any, arms limitations would complement NATO's nuclear strategy? This article lays out our answers.

From flexible response to decisive response

By the 1960s, NATO faced two growing threats: the Soviets' capability to mount a vast, mechanised military offensive against NATO; and their acquisition of a large, intercontinental, strategic nuclear arsenal. These threats increased the difficulty of both 'forward defence' along what was then the inter-German border and of depending on strategic nuclear 'massive retaliation' by the United States, which was NATO's response to the threat of Soviet aggression in the 1950s. Just as the Soviet conventional threat grew, the advent of Soviet intercontinental missiles undercut the US threat to resort directly to wholesale strategic nuclear warfare.

In light of this dangerous predicament, the US proposed – and, in 1967, NATO approved – a strategy of 'flexible response'. In essence, NATO warned that it would use in-theatre nuclear weapons first if conventional defence failed, and then escalate as necessary until the Soviets ended their aggression. Although this strategy would expose both the European allies and, ultimately, the United States to Soviet nuclear retaliation, that gamble

was deemed worth taking for the sake of deterrence. The bet was that the Soviets would cease attacking if NATO showed a resolve to initiate nuclear war, especially if Warsaw Pact tank armies were obliterated by nuclear weapons. If the threat of flexible response was not credible enough to deter the Soviets, NATO's actual initial use of nuclear weapons would be. To create a believable option and a link between its conventional forces and strategic nuclear forces, NATO built up its battlefield nuclear forces.

Toward the end of the 1970s, West Germany and other European allies became concerned that strategic nuclear parity, as codified in US-Soviet arms-control agreements, cast doubt on whether the US threat to escalate to the use of intercontinental weapons if all else failed remained

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credible enough to assure deterrence. This concern was inflamed by the Soviet deployment of INF – notably, SS-20 missiles – that could strike Europe but not the United States. There were no comparable NATO systems deployed in Europe that could reach Moscow. Under the circumstances, Europeans feared ‘decoupling’ from America’s nuclear umbrella. In

order to repair this credibility gap, NATO decided to deploy its own INF missiles capable of reaching Moscow. As the Cold War wound down, the US and the Soviet Union reached an agreement banning INF missiles. The United States declared that NATO’s nuclear weapons would be used only as a ‘last resort’. Still, NATO did not rescind flexible response, and it has yet to clarify why it needs nuclear weapons beyond vague statements about deterrence.

Just as NATO’s nuclear doctrine needed revision in 1967 and 1979, so it needs revision now, starting with a basic question: why does NATO still need nuclear weapons? We propose that the reason is, purely and simply, to deter Russia from using nuclear weapons first. To achieve this goal, NATO should unambiguously warn of proportional nuclear retaliation for Russian first use. Provided it is clear about its response if Russia resorted to nuclear weapons, NATO need not state categorically that it would refrain from using nuclear weapons for any other reason, thus finessing the contentious no-first-use issue. A statement by NATO that it needs nuclear weapons to

deter Russian first use would be clear, understandable and politically defensible. Strategically, it would disabuse the Russians of any belief that their first-use threat could make Russia itself a sanctuary from which to stage and support aggression against a NATO state.

This nuclear strategy, which would be complete and coherent, could be termed 'decisive response' in that it conveys resolve and dispels any doubts the Russians might harbour about NATO's willingness to use nuclear weapons in retaliation. Though NATO's current policy does not exclude this possibility, present conditions make it necessary to eliminate any lingering ambiguity.

A declaration by NATO explaining its need for nuclear weapons would not constitute a no-first-use pledge: it would specify what NATO would do, not what it wouldn't do.⁸ Several allies, including the United States, resist a no-first-use policy to deter biological or cyber attacks – reasons having nothing to do with a Russian conventional threat.⁹ But NATO need not make a no-first-use pledge in order to make plain that its nuclear weapons exist to deter Russia from using such weapons first.

The doctrinal implications of this strategy would need to be understood and addressed in advance. Waiting until conflict breaks out before confronting the meaning of 'fundamentally altering the nature' of a war is a recipe for confusion and contention at the worst possible moment. Final decisions regarding the use of nuclear weapons will of course depend on the crisis at hand and remain fundamentally political. But there should be no delay in stating the principles and implications of the strategy.

Thus, options regarding weapons and targets in the event deterrence fails must be anticipated. Strategic-deterrence theory distinguishes between 'counter-value' and 'counterforce' options, the latter comprising enemy nuclear-retaliatory capabilities and the former being essentially anything else, including other war-making capacities, industrial centres and, by implication (though never uttered), population centres. In the Cold War, NATO's battlefield nuclear weapons were targeted on massed Warsaw Pact armoured forces, a target that is no longer relevant. Under decisive response, the targets hit by NATO in a proportional response would depend greatly on the character of Russia's initial nuclear strike. If Russia chose to attack

NATO conventional forces, it would face a response that would severely damage its remaining conventional capability and guarantee its defeat.

Decisive response and NATO's overall defence strategy

NATO is making serious efforts to prevent Russia from threatening even the most exposed ally. Forces are being deployed to forward areas; readiness is being improved; and the ability to surge over-matching forces to end Russian aggressions is being enhanced.¹⁰ Russia must know that the inevitable outcome of conventional conflict would be defeat once NATO reinforcements were brought to bear. But again, such reinforcements could be inadequate or terribly costly if NATO were inhibited from striking targets on Russian soil.

Say Russia attempted to seize eastern Estonia, with its Russian-speaking majority. Without delay, NATO would attempt to gain air control – the ability to deny enemy use of the air and to strike enemy forces on the ground at will. Russia has world-class extended-range integrated air-defence systems (IADS) with which to challenge NATO air control. Critical components of IADS are based on Russian territory. If NATO failed to suppress Russian air defence out of a fear of provoking nuclear war, its forward battlegroups could be destroyed, captured or made to retreat, and reinforcements would incur heavy losses.

It is possible that Russia would commit such low-grade aggression against a NATO member that forward-deployed local and NATO forces could handle the situation. Yet even low-grade aggression is still aggression, and NATO would still need to use sufficient force to eliminate a Russian military presence from NATO territory – possibly forcing Russia to rely on capabilities based on its own territory. In any case, imagining that there could be circumstances in which NATO would not need to strike Russian territory is hardly an argument against a nuclear strategy aimed directly at deterring Russian first use. Bluntly put, Russia must understand that NATO will not hesitate to strike targets in Russia if that is what is needed to defeat aggression. Russian hybrid warfare argues for, not against, decisive response.

NATO's overall defence strategy under decisive response would be to deploy light forces; reinforce them rapidly with enough power to defeat

Russian forces; strike critical military capabilities on Russian territory if necessary to ensure NATO forces prevail; and use the threat of nuclear retaliation to deter Russian use of nuclear weapons in response to such strikes. Decisive response would give the Russians pause before contemplating *any* aggression, including the hybrid sort, against a NATO ally in the belief that their own territory is off-limits.

Decisive response and strategic nuclear deterrence

Even the most erudite deterrence theorists had trouble reconciling flexible response with mutual assured destruction (MAD). Would the United States escalate to the use of intercontinental nuclear weapons, as flexible response could call for, knowing that assured destruction would result? The gamble, or bluff, was that the Soviets would stop hostilities against NATO rather than test US willingness to use strategic weapons. Yet MAD diminished the credibility of flexible response because the latter put the onus on the United States to decide whether to escalate to all-out nuclear war and thus risk its own destruction.

MAD, which remains the keystone of US–Russian strategic nuclear stability, is easier to square with decisive response than it was with flexible response. The onus of starting a nuclear war, of escalating and of deciding whether to risk assured destruction would fall squarely on the Russians. NATO and the United States would be using nuclear weapons only to retaliate proportionately and in kind. Strategic theory suggests that in such a spiralling conflict, the side with the highest local stakes and advantage has the upper hand – and that would be NATO.¹¹

The US–Russian strategic nuclear relationship is bound to influence the efficacy of decisive response. Although MAD remains in effect, the relationship is more complicated than that formulation would suggest. Given the United States' survivable, unmatched strategic offensive forces and the paucity of Russian capabilities to counter them, the US has no cause to worry about its second-strike capability. In contrast, the Russians worry a great deal – much more than they should – about the viability and credibility of their retaliatory force. The United States is superior to Russia in ballistic-missile defence (BMD), global intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance

(ISR), conventional prompt global strike (CPGS) and anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities, all of which could be used to degrade Russia's retaliatory capability. The Russians worry not only about a US strategic nuclear first strike, but also about a non-nuclear one.¹² The Russians' apprehension about their strategic deterrent is apparent in their strategic-force investment and modernisation programmes, such as their transoceanic nuclear torpedo and hypersonic glide missiles, which are inherently second-strike systems.¹³

This is not the place to consider whether the United States should try to alleviate the Russians' worries about their strategic deterrent, given the risk of Russian launch-on-warning, or instead to let them squander scarce state resources to protect a deterrent which the US does not really mean to challenge. The United States remains wedded to the need for strategic nuclear stability and thus mutual deterrence. For the purposes of NATO strategy, however, if Russia has doubts about the effectiveness of its strategic deterrent, it should be that much more reluctant to initiate nuclear war in the first place. In this respect, Russian concerns about US strategic superiority reinforce decisive response.

Capabilities

Numerical equality and matching weapon types are less important than the absolute capability of NATO to retaliate on a scale that would exceed any possible Russian gain in attacking a NATO member. Conceptually, it is important for NATO to have the capability to respond at both the regional level and the intercontinental level.

NATO has stated that 'the strategic forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies'.¹⁴ And indeed, these forces could be called on at some point as part of decisive response in the event Russia starts a nuclear war. However, because a strategic nuclear attack on Russia could lead to Russian strategic *and* regional nuclear strikes, region-level weapons might be NATO's better initial option, while it holds strategic weapons in reserve to deter Russian escalation.

Whereas flexible response required nuclear-weapons capabilities on every rung of the escalatory ladder, decisive response would not. It is only

important that NATO have capabilities in theatre to respond in kind to what might be a very limited Russian first strike. The key to decisive response lies not in outsized arsenals of theatre nuclear-delivery systems, but in unhesitating decision-making and action. The few hundred B-61 gravity bombs available in Europe¹⁵ to be delivered by allied dual-capable aircraft provide an adequate deterrent capability provided they are linked with decisive decision-making. Of course, this force must be kept modern, safe and ready to use on short notice.

In addition, if Russia deploys large numbers of ground-based INF systems, the United States can respond with nuclear air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, which are as capable as ground-launched cruise missiles and can strike targets well inside Russia with extraordinary precision. There is no need for another divisive debate over NATO land-based INF deployments like the one the Alliance experienced 40 years ago. Back then, NATO relied on the threat to use nuclear weapons first and to escalate as necessary in order to deter Soviet aggression. Now, consistent with decisive response, NATO would use nuclear weapons in retaliation for Russian first use. Because the threat to use nuclear weapons second is inherently more credible than the threat to use them first, NATO need not match Russian nuclear capabilities of every sort and on every rung, including land-based INF. Likewise, NATO battlefield nuclear weapons are unimportant because there is no threat of a Russian conventional attack too massive to defeat with conventional defence.

It is important to consider the role of missile defence in decisive response. The United States has gone the extra mile to try to assuage Russian fears that BMD has been intended all along to deny Russia's retaliatory capability and thus support a first-strike strategic posture. NATO's BMD deployment is meant to counter Iranian missiles and is not capable of intercepting a Russian missile attack on the United States, which in any case would be too large to destroy. At the same time, Russia's generally belligerent behaviour, reliance on nuclear first use and emphasis on theatre nuclear weapons raise the question of whether NATO should consider deploying missile defence against Russia to complement decisive response. Under certain circumstances, we believe it should.

It is not yet necessary to shift from NATO's current policy of deploying missile defences only against threats from the Middle East. However, if the demise of the INF Treaty encourages Russia to increase its INF capabilities directed against NATO, the Alliance could respond by developing and deploying defences specifically for this threat, with Iran becoming a 'lesser but included case'. Russia might invest in some mixture of ballistic, cruise and, once developed, hypersonic weapons. As technology advances, US regional missile defence, made available to NATO, could be effective against all three types of missiles, though ballistic ones still represent the biggest challenge because of their extraordinary speed. Such a NATO system would not negate Russia's strategic deterrent, though the Russians would insist otherwise.

Of course, Russia could respond to the development of NATO missile defences by increasing its arsenal of INF missiles, which could overwhelm these defences. Based on available technology, nuclear warfare remains 'offence dominant': it is cheaper to add missiles (or decoys) than to expand defence, and a sizeable fraction of a large missile attack would surely avoid interception. Nevertheless, by reducing the expected damage from a Russian nuclear attack, enhanced NATO missile defence could complement deterrence based on decisive response. While enhanced NATO missile defence might lead Russia to expand its nuclear forces, this could severely tax Russia's limited resources, or divert them from more useable non-nuclear offensive capabilities. At the same time, increased Russian INF – whether stimulated by NATO or not – would not undermine the credibility of decisive response, especially since Russia lacks missile-defence technology.

Lastly, NATO must decide on the role of its conventional deep-strike systems. It may be tempting to view these as an alternative to nuclear weapons – indeed, that is precisely what worries the Russians. Decisive response would require making clear that the Russians can count on nuclear retaliation by NATO if they use nuclear weapons first. The possibility of a conventional response to a Russian first nuclear strike would harm deterrence. While the United States presumably will continue to invest in and improve its conventional deep-strike capabilities for various global needs, the logic, credibility and utility of decisive response require that these are not intended for retaliation against a Russian first use of nuclear weapons.

Arms limitations and restraint

Given NATO's conventional military superiority and its concern about Russia's first-use policy, a no-first-use agreement with Russia would have merit. However, it would be difficult to achieve a consensus in NATO to propose this – starting with US and French objections. Moreover, the Russians could be counted on not to agree. A no-first-use offer would make clear to the world, including to European publics, that Russia and not NATO would be the side to start a nuclear war.

Negotiation of a post-INF Treaty agreement to limit theatre nuclear weapons up to and including INF would also make sense, though China's growing INF capabilities could not be ignored. Conceivably, NATO investment in a more robust missile-defence system would increase Russian interest in a new agreement to limit *both* offensive and defensive capabilities in Europe. In any case, the United States should not negotiate away its air- and sea-launched cruise-missile capabilities, which have vital worldwide missions, including non-nuclear ones. In sum, both a no-first-use agreement and a new INF agreement are long shots, but may be worth trying for. Decisive response could strengthen NATO's negotiating position in both, but should not be contingent on either one.

Negotiations to extend or replace the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty would follow their own logic. Extending it, for now, would help to maintain strategic stability, which would in turn reinforce decisive response. A replacement agreement might require the participation of China, US willingness to scrap or halt BMD, or both. Neither is likely to happen. In any case, decisive response should not – and its effectiveness would not – depend on a new US–Russian strategic deal.

One understanding that would be useful, with or without decisive response, would be to place nuclear command, control and communications off-limits for cyber war.¹⁶ If NATO opts, for respectable political reasons, to accompany a new nuclear posture with an arms-control initiative, this would be a good candidate.

Lurking in the shadows of this argument is the question of whether America's European allies would endorse decisive response. Politics and diplomacy – which aim to avoid offending allied publics and Russian sensibilities – may favour continued ambiguity, which we believe is risky. Instead, we recommend expounding the need for clarity in a way that shines the spotlight on Russia's nuclear threat. (Ironically, the very fact that NATO's current nuclear strategy is uncontroversial underscores its inefficacy.) Even in the darkest days of the Cold War, NATO had its eye on public sentiment in espousing a commitment to both defence and detente. When it came time to counter the Soviet build-up of INF, NATO adopted a dual-track approach, calling for an INF ban even as it deployed missiles of its own.

Allies could insist on some sort of olive branch to accompany a clearer nuclear strategy. Alternatively, they may have seen enough of Putin's unruliness to justify decisive response on its own merits. Moreover, the doctrine is designed to deter both nuclear war and nuclear escalation. After all, it is Russia that has exhibited a proclivity to menace its neighbours, to call out NATO as an aggressor and to warn that it would use nuclear weapons first. The fact that the nuclear strategy proposed here is strictly retaliatory, is meant to prevent nuclear war and is needed to fulfil NATO's defence obligations could provide allies with sufficient political cover to accept it.

No harm would come from talking to the Russians about the role of nuclear weapons in European security – but only *after* decisive response is approved. NATO's position would be that nuclear weapons should be kept at a low level and used for retaliation. Where such a conversation would lead is hard to predict. At some point, Russia, strapped for resources, may seek accommodation. In that event, decisive response would help NATO drive a hard bargain.

Before closing, we cannot ignore the current turmoil in transatlantic relations, as well as questions that have been raised about US trustworthiness and commitment to NATO. This may or may not pass, depending on American and European politics and allies' reactions to one another. In one scenario, the European allies would pursue increasing autonomy – presumably EU-centric – from the United States in foreign and security policy, both in and beyond Europe. In turn, the United

States could become less active in European security affairs, perhaps even welcoming greater allied accountability. Where would such developments leave a NATO nuclear strategy of decisive response, given its crucial reliance on US nuclear capabilities and doctrine?

The answer depends on the viability of NATO under conditions of increasing political separation between the United States and Europe. Yet it is hard to foresee the death of NATO in the years to come even with this separation. While the Alliance's function as a venue for transatlantic consultation and collaboration on security matters in Europe and elsewhere could unfortunately decay, the North Atlantic Treaty itself, and its common-defence provision, will probably survive. Unless and until the Russian threat of aggression – hybrid or otherwise – recedes, Europeans and Americans will probably stick together to deter and defeat it. As long as any allies are exposed to this threat, NATO will need the ability to defend them. And as long as Russia relies on the threat to use nuclear weapons first to make itself a sanctuary in the event of war, NATO will have a need to make clear that it would unleash nuclear retaliation against any such Russian action. Decisive response, along with doctrine, capabilities and procedures to carry it out, would meet that continuing need.

Notes

- 1 The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports that Russia spent \$61.4bn on defence in 2018. See Nan Tian et al., 'Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2018', SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2019, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/fs_1904_milex_2018.pdf. Others place the number higher, especially when calculated using purchasing-power parity. See, for example, Michael Kofman, who gives a figure of \$150–180bn in 'Russian Defense Spending Is Much Larger, and More Sustainable than It Seems', *Defense News*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/05/03/russian-defense-spending-is-much-larger-and-more-sustainable-than-it-seems/>. NATO defence spending is about \$1 trillion per year and, unlike Russian defence spending, is growing. See NATO, 'Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012–2019)', 25 June 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf.
- 2 Julian Cooper, 'How Much Does Russia Spend on Nuclear Weapons?', SIPRI, October 2018,

- <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2018/how-much-does-russia-spend-nuclear-weapons>.
- 3 Embassy of the Russian Federation in the United Kingdom, 'Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', 25 December 2014, section III, para. 27, distributed as a press release dated 29 June 2015, <http://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.
 - 4 NATO, 'Active Engagement, Modern Defense', 19–20 November 2010, para. 17.
 - 5 See NATO's 'Deterrence and Defence Posture Review', 20 May 2012.
 - 6 NATO, 'Warsaw Summit Communiqué', 9 July 2016, para. 54, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.
 - 7 More needs to be done in regard to conventional defence, especially long-range strike.
 - 8 In this sense, decisive response would differ somewhat from the suggestion made by US vice president Joseph Biden in January 2017 that deterring a nuclear strike (and if necessary retaliating against it) should be the 'sole purpose' of nuclear weapons. See 'Remarks by the Vice President on Nuclear Security', Washington DC, 12 January 2017.
 - 9 France sees no-first-use as incompatible with its rationale of having nuclear weapons to ensure its survival.
 - 10 See Franklin D. Kramer and Hans Binnendijk, 'Meeting the Russian Conventional Challenge: Effective Deterrence by Prompt Reinforcement', Atlantic Council, February 2018.
 - 11 This is one of the key lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis. See, for example, Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson, 1999).
 - 12 See James M. Acton, 'Russia and Strategic Conventional Weapons: Concerns and Responses', *Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2015, pp. 141–54, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/02/03/russia-and-strategic-conventional-weapons-pub-62676>.
 - 13 These Russian programmes are designed to foil US BMD in a retaliatory attack, but they have no first-strike utility.
 - 14 See NATO, 'Warsaw Summit Communiqué', para. 53.
 - 15 For a recent estimate of the number of B-61s in Europe, see NTI, 'Nuclear Disarmament NATO', 28 June 2019, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/nato-nuclear-disarmament/>.
 - 16 See David C. Gompert and Martin Libicki, 'Cyber War and Nuclear Peace', *Survival*, vol. 61, no. 4, August–September 2019, pp. 45–62.