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Nuclear weapons have always triggered controversy. That also applies to the role of nuclear weapons inside the Atlantic Alliance. Kjolv Egeland has written an illuminating article in *Diplomacy & Statecraft* that sheds new light on the history of NATO's nuclear policy and has implications for NATO's current policy. The red line throughout the text is the growing nuclear burden-sharing within the Alliance over time. Most readers are probably unaware that the Washington Treaty (1949) that established the Alliance, does not mention nuclear weapons, despite the fact that the nuclear era had already existed for four years. Danish Foreign Minister Gustav Rasmussen was responsible for the removal of the nuclear sentence from the first NATO Strategic Concept one year earlier (147).

Egeland's article tells the nuclear story from the origins of NATO until today using the seven NATO Strategic Concepts as light towers. Strategic Concepts are the main official NATO documents on which the member states at the level of state leaders agree upon, not limited to but including nuclear weapons policy. An unspoken rule seems to be that more or less every ten years an update is required, with the exception of the first phase that contains two Strategic Concepts in a very short time, respectively in 1950 and 1952. NATO also skipped one at the beginning of the 1980s. The article could have been more explicit on this matter, but the reader can assume that the Euromissiles crisis made the prospect of a new visionary text based on consensus too controversial at that time.

The nuclearization of NATO came in three phases: in its first year, as already stated, the Alliance did not agree upon the role of nuclear weapons. The first two Strategic Concepts, which were written in the beginning of the 1950s, eschewed mentioning nuclear weapons as well, but added the language of "strategic bombing with all means" (147). The latter can only be interpreted as being nuclear weapons. The nuclearization reached adulthood with the first explicit mentioning of nuclear weapons in the third Strategic Concept in 1957. Also later on, the importance of nuclear weapons in NATO's doctrine varied. That is certainly relevant in the post-Cold War era, when, after a period in which their role was de-emphasized with the (for the first time completely unclassified) Strategic Concepts of 1991, 1999, and especially in 2010, their role again started to increase due to the deteriorating relationship with Russia after its illegal take-over of the Crimea. The author also sees a change towards de-emphasizing nuclear weapons – less convincingly in my view – during the Cold War. For Egeland, the flexible response strategy "reduced the military role of nuclear weapons in NATO's overall strategy" (153). One could also interpret this move away from massive retaliation as a manner of making nuclear deterrence more credible, regardless of whether that was successful or not.

The emphasis of Egeland's article, however, does not concern the evolution of nuclearization of NATO's policy, but on how the allies share the nuclear burden. That story is even less known. The article shows that there was a clear evolution from emphasizing the role of the nuclear armed states inside NATO to what Egeland calls the 'collectivization' and 'pulverization' of responsibility, which are better known as nuclear burden-sharing.

The particular role for the U.S. is explicitly mentioned in the first three Strategic Concepts, respectively, in 1950, 1952 and 1957. From 1962 onwards, also the UK nuclear weapons were committed to NATO, and those of France after 1974 (p.163, footnote 43). But the major departure from the policy of emphasizing the role of the nuclear weapon states was decided at the NATO Paris Summit in 1957, when the U.S. proposed to station tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, and states like Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and also Germany seemed to agree with that idea (150). At that time, the decision – which was not discussed in the respective parliaments¹ – was legitimized by pointing out the gap with respect to conventional weapons vis-à-vis the East and the need for relying on a credible nuclear umbrella (although one can ask oneself to what degree extended nuclear deterrence in general was credible). If NATO's nuclear umbrella limited itself to U.S. strategic nuclear weapons, the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrent was questioned. Would Washington be willing to risk an attack on Boston to save Brussels? Tactical nuclear weapons, which had to be installed on the Western European battlefield, would make this dilemma smaller, according to the advocates of maximum deterrence/counterforce strategy (meaning targeting the enemy's nuclear weapons instead of larger military installations or cities).²

This collectivization of the nuclear responsibility moved into a higher gear with the establishment of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) in 1966 (153), in which only France did not participate (which is still the case). The NPG included not only the host nations of American tactical nuclear weapons but also all the other member states, including those with a so-called footnote policy that states that they are not willing to station nuclear weapons on their territory in times of peace (Denmark, Norway, and Spain) or even in times of war (Iceland and Lithuania).

Most interestingly, Egeland points out that this nuclear burden-sharing had a substantial side-effect: that the nuclear weapon states inside NATO could (mis)use the argument of spreading the burden to further legitimize their own nuclear force structure and declaratory policies that would otherwise have fallen under more scrutiny due to the pressure of the non-allied non-nuclear weapon states in the framework of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT, art.6). As Egeland argues, “For the pro-nuclear actors in NATO, reversing the nuclear sharing agenda would lead to NATO losing its ‘nuclear culture’ and put the three nuclear-armed allies under increased ‘moral pressure’ to disarm. Ending nuclear sharing, in this view, could produce an unwanted focus on the nuclear-armed allies as ‘guilty,’ ‘unenlightened’ and ‘retrograde’ parties standing in the way of disarmament” (158).

To make this assertion more concrete, Egeland could have given the example of the modernization of the B-61 atomic bomb, to be stationed in Western Europe, on which the U.S. has spent \$10 billion over the last number of years. With respect to declaratory policy, it is worth noting that the main reason why the U.S. has still not evolved towards a no first use (NFU) policy (in contrast to, for instance, China) is the obstruction by allies. When President Barack Obama tried to change the declaratory policy at the end of his second term, he was opposed by Japan and some of the European allies, who were afraid that a NFU policy would undermine the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.³

A NFU policy would also undermine the need for an extensive arsenal, which brings us back to the force structure policy. The question as to who benefits from a large nuclear arsenal should be asked. Egeland uses the term ‘pro-nuclear actors’ more than once without going into detail. It is clear that the actors who have most parochial interests involved are those whose jobs and income depend on the production of these weapons. The \$35 billion that the U.S. spends annually on nuclear weapons end up in the pocket of many organizations, all of whom have an interest in continuing the existing policy: the Pentagon, and especially the Air Force and more in particular the departments dealing with the nuclear forces (bomber and tactical aircraft wings, missileers), as well the submarine Navy; the cities and states (and their politicians) that host these nuclear bases (like in North Dakota and Montana); the nuclear labs (related to the Department of Energy) where still

¹ Robert Dahl, *Controlling Nuclear Weapons: Democracy versus Guardianship* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

² Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

³ John Holdren, “The Overwhelming Case for No First Use,” *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 76:1: 3-7.

thousands of scientists work on nuclear weapons research and development (in Los Alamos, Lawrence Livermore, and Sandia Lab); the nuclear weapons industry that produces these weapon systems (like Boeing and Lockheed Martin); banks (like the Bank of America) that invest in these industries; universities (like the University of California) that have joined research projects with these labs and industries; consultancy firms in Washington DC (like Science Applications International Corporation), and think tanks like the Heritage Foundation. This 'military-industrial-complex' as President Dwight Eisenhower called it, makes it extremely difficult for presidents – and especially Democrats – to change course. Both presidents Bill Clinton and Obama experienced that difficulty. Policy inertia is the result. The lobbying efforts of this gigantic complex best explain best why there is so little progress with respect to nuclear disarmament.⁴

But, and this is where Egeland's article makes its most significant contribution, having allies around the world that apparently like to live under a nuclear umbrella helps the U.S. nuclear priesthood to make their case in Congress and the White House. Without the cover of the allies, the nuclear military-industrial complex in the U.S. (as well as the UK and France) would be under more domestic pressure.

Unfortunately, the allies are not aware of this mechanism. And even if the allies were aware of their critical role in delegitimizing nuclear weapons, they bump into what they had agreed upon before with consensus, sometimes with much difficulty. For an individual member state is not evident to question the consensus. It takes courage. But it is not impossible: when the U.S. proposed at the beginning of the 1990s the modernization of the nuclear short-range Lance missiles, all of the allies agreed, except Belgium. Under pressure of the socialists, Belgium blocked the modernization. After a while, Germany and all the others agreed as well.

Most of the time the consensus rule is regarded as an obstacle that is too large to circumvent to change existing policy. Sometimes one gets the impression that it is easier to install new weapons and doctrines than to get rid of old ones. Indeed, if one scrutinizes the attempts to delegitimize nuclear weapons inside NATO in the recent past, the difficulty seems to be insuperable. Joschka Fischer (Green Party), German Minister of Foreign Affairs, tried to initiate a NATO no first use policy (NFU) in the 1990s as a result of the implosion of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, but failed. Ten years later, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Luxemburg put the tactical nuclear weapons issue on the agenda of the informal NATO Summit in Tallinn in 2010 (158).⁵ However, the U.S., supported by France, the UK and most Eastern European states, blocked their demand for change. The result of the internal 'debate' was a consensus on the following sentence: "that as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will need a nuclear deterrent," which also ended up in the 2010 Strategic Concept. The latter can be interpreted in different ways. At first sight, and this is how I interpreted it as well at that time, that sentence does not add anything new. Nobody expects that the West will eliminate its nuclear weapons if Russia and China do not act in parallel. Egeland's analysis pushes us to think deeper. For him, this sentence is the culmination of the collectivization of NATO as a 'nuclear Alliance,' and he calls NATO "the rhetorical veto-player" (145 and 159). He argues that once NATO is defined as a 'nuclear' Alliance, pressure for denuclearization might seem as "anti-NATO" (145). As a result, there is no consensus to withdraw the tactical nuclear weapons (as NATO keeps repeating). Importantly, there is also no consensus to keep the tactical nuclear weapons.

If the world wants to get rid of nuclear weapons, and this is for many observers not a given (but which is required by the NPT and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)), the allied states will have to un-do the spread of the burden of nuclear weapons inside NATO. With a bit of good will, one can already perceive some recent cracks in the

⁴ Tom Sauer, *Nuclear Inertia. US Nuclear Weapons Policy after the Cold War* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005).

⁵ Paolo Foradori, ed., *Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Euro-Atlantic Security* (London: Routledge, 2013); Sauer and Bob van der Zwaan, "US Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe after NATO's Lisbon Summit," *International Relations* 26:1 (March 2012): 78-100.

NATO nuclear wall.⁶ Many NATO allied states abstained (in contrast to the three NATO nuclear weapons states) on UN resolutions on the Humanitarian Initiative since 2012 that later led to the TPNW in 2017. Even with respect to the TPNW, the Netherlands and Belgium are beginning to question the consensus. Despite the immense pressure by the U.S., as the only NATO member state the Netherlands was present at the creation of the TPNW (although it finally voted against it). The Belgian government declaration of 30 September 2020 refers in a rather positive way to the TPNW, which is a precedent in the Alliance. Depending on the election results in 2021, under pressure of the Greens and Socialists the German policy may change as well. This may have substantial repercussions for NATO because if Germany withdraws the U.S. tactical nuclear weapons, the Netherlands and Belgium are likely to follow suit.⁷ It would be a first step in the de-collectivization of NATO's nuclear weapons policy that would open space for delegitimizing the role of nuclear weapons in the national defense doctrines of the U.S., the UK, and France.

Mutatis mutandis, if the allies keep hanging on to extended nuclear deterrence, one can easily predict a renewed societal and political debate inside these countries, not only about nuclear weapons as a result of the entry into force of the TPNW, but also about the remaining legitimacy of NATO as such. In the end, it is about the legitimacy of policies in democracies. It is abundantly clear that the unpopular nuclear policies have been introduced in the allied states without any political – let alone societal – debate. The secret bilateral nuclear agreements between the U.S. and the host nations complicate further a serious debate. As long as ministers of defense of the host nations cannot confirm or deny the presence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on their territory, journalists will stop asking the question, and the issue will be silenced. The result will be a status-quo policy that is only in the interest of the 'pro-nuclear actors' inside the nuclear weapon states. One of the merits of Egeland's article is that it again focuses our attention on this important issue.

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⁶ Sauer and Claire Nardon, "The Softening Rhetoric by Nuclear-Armed States and NATO Allies on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," *War on the Rocks*, 7 December 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/12/the-softening-rhetoric-by-nuclear-armed-states-and-nato-allies-on-the-treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons/>.

⁷ Pia Fuhrhop, Ulrich Kühn, and Oliver Meier, "Creating an Opportunity to Withdraw U.S. Nuclear Weapons from Europe," *Arms Control Today*, October 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-10/features/creating-opportunity-withdraw-us-nuclear-weapons-europe>.