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# **ChaIr REPORT**

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO)

## The Future of Tactical and Intermediate Nuclear Weapons in Europe

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**Introduction**

The United States and the Russian Federation (and before it the Soviet Union) have long acknowledged the immense security benefits of nuclear arms control. Through the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, both States eliminated an entire class of weapons. In addition, thousands of warheads have been removed from service under the START and new START accords. Yet, despite significant reductions in their strategic nuclear arsenals, both countries have been reluctant to include non-strategic nuclear weapons in the arms control process.

### **Key Vocabulary**

Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Another term for ‘non-strategic nuclear weapons’, is are designed to have less explosive power compared to strategic nuclear weapons. Therefore, they can be considered as friendly forces during military situations.

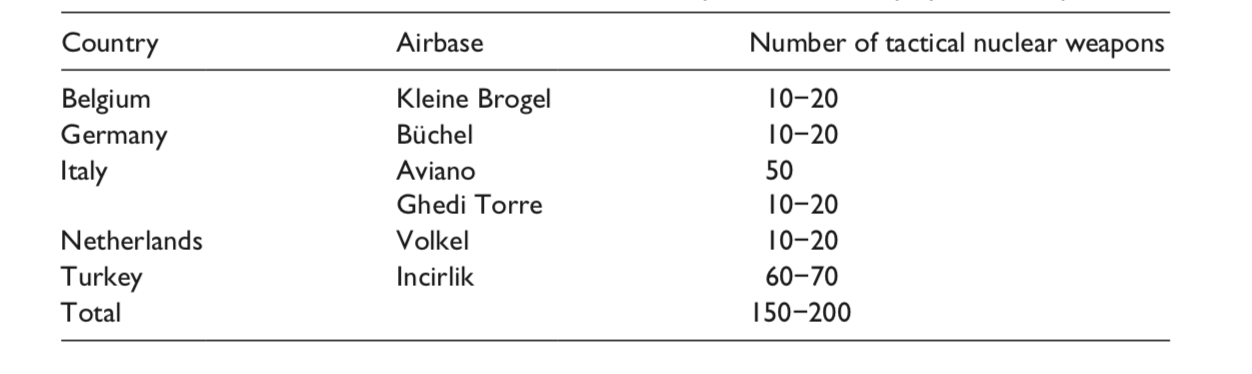
Intermediate Nuclear Weapons: It is a class of nuclear weapons with a range of 1000-1500 km. They are regarded as offensive, first-strike weapons. For example, some multiple warheads developed by the Soviet Union could strike several targets anywhere in Western Europe in less than 10 minutes.

Multi-Lateral Force (MFL): It is a proposal coming from the United States to share

Nuclear Proliferation: It is the spread of nuclear weapons, fissionable material and weapons- applicable nuclear technology and information to nations not recognized as nuclear states by the treaty of Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

**Focused Overview**

**The U.S. Nuclear Weapons Gradually Diminishing in Europe**

In 1945, which is considered to be the beginning of the nuclear era, USA became the first state to test out a nuclear weapon and was the only state that applied it. However, in 1949 The USSR inevitably followed U.S.’s footsteps, thus testing their first nuclear explosive device. During the infamous era of the Cold War, the U.S. transported its tactical nuclear weapons in Europe for dissuasion purposes against the conventional superiority of the Warsaw Pact nations which are Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania. The main thinking at the time was that the threat of the Soviets initiating a conflict in Europe would get reduced if there would be the presence of a mutually assured destruction between the U.S. and Soviet. The first U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe arrived in 1953 through bilateral “Programs of Cooperation” between the United States and host nations within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. Such programs were signed with Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Turkey and The United Kingdom.

The distribution of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe by country.

Subsequently, the U.S. escalated their tactical weapons in Europe from 2.500 in 1961 to 7.200 in 1966. NATO’s nuclear policy was established by a series of ‘guidelines’ at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, just after the catastrophe of the Multi-Lateral Force (MFL). Afterwards, the number of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons based in Europe started to undergo a major downfall at the beginning of the 1970s. As a result, the numbers dropped from some 6.000 in 1980 to about 4.600 in the mid-1980s.

Not feeling completely comfortable with the presence of the U.S. nuclear umbrella in Europe due to the deterrent’s recognized lack of credibility, both the theory and practice of extended nuclear deterrence were criticized during the Cold War. This led to a variety of emotional debates inside the Atlantic Alliance, especially after the arrival of Russian intercontinental missiles, which made the United States accessible to nuclear counterattack by the Soviet Union. A majority of the Europeans did not give a possibility for the idea of the U.S. actually jeopardize Baltimore or Boston in order to defend Berlin or Brussels. The whole point of the alliance is to indicate to the Russians that they cannot be entirely sure whether the U.S. would respond or not in a way which could lead to mutual destruction. Advocates of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe claimed that without the U.S. nuclear umbrella, Washington’s European allies would set the acquiring nuclear weapon themselves. Thus, these tactical nuclear weapons prevented nuclear proliferation. As an instance, the U.S. nuclear umbrella did not interfere France from acquiring nuclear weapons.

**Removal of The Soviet Nuclear Weapons from Europe**

From the implosion of both the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the removal of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons from the territory of Eastern European states, and the newly independent states which used to be composing the former Soviet Union; it was predicted for the U.S. to be withdrawing its nuclear explosive devices from Europe in the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, this reciprocal gesture did not happen. In other words, the proposal of negotiating a bilateral treaty on the issue of tactical nuclear weapons coming from Russia in 1991 was unsuccessful. The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI) which were deliberated as “unilateral/reciprocal measures” that allowed rapid reductions without a formal arms control agreement, cleared only half of the U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. George H.W. Bush, who was the president of the United States at the time, promised to reduce the number of nuclear bombs in Europe from 1.500 to 700.

**The NATO Strategic Concept**

Substantially, NATO’s nuclear force structure and operational policy altered. In the NATO Strategic Concept, it is described that the Allies have taken a series of steps which reflect the post-Cold War security environment. These consist of a sudden reduction of all types and numbers of NATO’s sub-strategic forces including the eradication of all nuclear artillery and ground-launched short-range nuclear missiles, a consequential loosening of the readiness criteria for nuclear-role forces, and the termination of on-going peacetime nuclear contingency plans. It is clearly stated in the concept that NATO’s nuclear forces no longer target any specific country. The Special Weapons Branch within the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) had been radically downgraded after the Cold War.

In 1991, the words “weapons of last resort” were deleted from the NATO Strategic Concept, which had been added for the first time in NATO documents the prior year. President Mikhail Gorbachev and later Boris Yeltsin, responded to this gesture by eliminating 50 percent of their tactical warheads for aircraft, 33 percent of nuclear warheads for surface ships and submarines and all warheads for tactical land-based missiles, artillery shells and mines.

**Effort in Changing the Prevailing Policy**

The chance of changing the prevailing policy escalated with the Clinton Nuclear Posture Review established in 1993-1994. Since 1991, it was crystal clear that Russia had neither the capacity nor the intentions to invade Western Europe. Also, since the Russian economy was facing a severe downturn, Russia’s significant loss of power in international scene was rendered obvious. The option of withdrawing all U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe was seriously considered by senior Clinton appointees, however in this respect due to the bureaucratic opposition, conservative thinking, and a lack of political leadership; the Review failed. The result was that the United States lowered the number of its nuclear explosive devices based in Europe further, from 700 to 500 by the early 2000s. The untouched nuclear weapons were consolidated in fewer bases in Turkey in 1995, and in Germany a year after. Another chance for a radical reduction in the number of deployed tactical nuclear weapons was offered at the Helsinki Summit in March 1997, where Clinton and Yeltsin talked about the possibility of including sub-strategic nuclear weapons in the next round of START negotiations. Nevertheless, due to START II never entering into force because of the controversy about missile defense, START III ended up never being negotiated.

In 1999, NATO has a second opportunity to rectify the status quo, as is was recommended at the time by Ivo Daalder, who is U.S. Ambassador at NATO from 2009. Despite the German and Canadian proposals for a no first-use policy, NATO’s policy remained unchanged. It stipulated that “Nuclear weapons generate a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace. The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to keep the peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war. They will continue to fulfill an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies’ response to military aggression.” The Strategic Concept also explicitly mentioned the nuclear weapons in Europe as an indispensable transatlantic link: “A credible Alliance nuclear posture and the demonstration of Alliance solidarity and common commitment to war prevention continue to require widespread participation by European Allies involved in collective defense planning in nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces on their territory and in command, control and consultation arrangements. Nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and American members of the Alliance. Therefore, the Alliance will maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe.” Despite the biggest overhaul in the international political system in half a century, and despite the administration of a Democratic U.S. president for eight years, U.S. nuclear weapons remained in Europe.

Including the withdrawal of all tactical nuclear weapons from Greece in 2001, the United States further reduced the number of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe from 500 to about 200 as of 2011 during the last decade. These reductions had been predicted by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General James Jones, when he visited the Belgian Senate in March 2004. The remaining U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe have been modernize between 1998 and 2003.

### **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### United States of America

In the 21st century, the United States is challenged by an escalating need to extend deterrence beyond the scope of that which can be accomplished by strategic systems reserved for retaliation to a massive nuclear strike on the continental United States. This is due to the growing recognition that any nuclear use would have strategic consequences, and that these weapons will have a role to play in assuring allies through extended deterrence guarantees. In addition, the 2001 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) established a “new Triad” that consisted all nuclear and non-nuclear strike capabilities in one category. This implies that in the future, the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal will serve the needs of extended deterrence in Europe through off-shore guarantees. The United States has global interests, and its military has global responsibilities. All U.S. nuclear weapons will continue to play a vital role as the ultimate guarantor of the nation’s security for the foreseeable future.

Multiple studies have come to the conclusion that nuclear weapons are here to stay permanently. Regardless of national objectives calling for a nuclear-free word, such weapons are likely to remain a part of the global security environment and will carry on holding a central role in U.S. security policy.

America’s attitude towards non-strategic nuclear weapons historically has been that they are valuable political tools for reassuring allies, both in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in other regions. The United States had adopted a defense-in-depth security concept since the dawn of the nuclear age. In simple terms, this means that when dealing with the possibility of nuclear attack by some nation-state or of nuclear terrorism by some non-state actor, the United States will first attempt to prevent the spread of dangerous materials and know-how to other states via nonproliferation policies. America has enduring national security interests, with nuclear weapons remaining a vital part of ensuring that security.

### The Russian Federation

Many Russian politicians and experts still look at NATO as an aggressive bloc, capable of attacking Russia. In their view, Russia should be on the alert to preclude attempt to make it vulnerable through supposedly benign calls for nuclear disarmament. Russian experts insist that Russia, unlike the United States and many NATO countries, is located within the range of nuclear weapons of all nuclear states, which elevates the tactical nuclear weapon role in Russia’s security calculus to a much higher level than the tactical. In addition, long Russian borders ensure a large number of security-sensitive areas.

Moreover, since Russia failed to modernize its national economy successfully, it cannot compete with the West in research, development, and production of expensive high-speed, high-precision, long-range conventional systems, which can potentially serve as a counterweight to TNWs. The Russian official position at the moment rests on the very sensitive demand or the withdrawal of all TNWs to national territories of their owners as a precondition for the start to any negotiations related to those weapons. This ultimatum is aimed at the essentially symbolic number of U.S. nuclear gravity bombs located in five NATO countries.

Despite Russian hopes about the effectiveness of pressure on the United States and NATO from European public opinion, time may be running out more quickly for the Russians than for NATO. There is a growing disparity between the Russian ability to maintain its TNW arsenal in safe and ready condition and U.S./NATO overall strategic dominance. Nevertheless, it would be risky for the United States and NATO to bet on gradually exhausting Russia to force a reduction of its TNWs and agreement to more cooperative security relations and arrangements.

Analysis of the Russian perspective on TNWs suggests that the issue of trust between Russia, on one hand, and the United States and NATO, on the other, is still very much at stake. The Russian demand for a U.S. nuclear withdrawal from Europe may be packaged as an attempt to achieve a more equalized position before the start of the negotiations. Many Western politicians and commentators, however, see it more as an attempt to further isolate America from Europe by driving a wedge between the United States and leading regional powers like Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands.

### Timeline of Events

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| --- | --- |
| **Date of Event (Day/Month/Year)** | **Description of Event** |
| July 1953 | The NATO Strategic Concept |
| 30 May 1975 | Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference |
| 8 December 1987 | Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty |
| 31 July 1991 | START 1 |
| 3 January 1993 | START 2 |
| 19 December 2010 | Lisbon Summit |

### **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

* United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1540 (2004) https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/sc1540/
* START 1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/START_I> https://www.britannica.com/event/Strategic-Arms-Reduction-Talks
* START 2 https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/start2
* Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/INFtreaty

### **Possible Solutions**

Today, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which “non-strategic” or “tactical” nuclear weapons would be deliberately used in a conflict in Europe. However, these weapons are still present on the continent and complicate efforts to strengthen the European security architecture. Moreover, these weapons pose potential risks of miscalculation, inadvertent escalation, or accidental use in a time of crisis.

Transparency is crucial to achieve while negotiating nuclear disarmament. Without reciprocated trust and security nations will not be ready to sacrifice or negotiate for that matter. Also, it should be made sure that countries are abiding by the treaties that they signed. With the sense of balance and with countries continuing to proliferate nuclear weapons, national security becomes an issue for all countries.

The formation of an intergovernmental organization with the purpose of tackling the issue between Russia and U.S. can be brought up. Member states can come together under this balanced and non-biased organization to cooperate and negotiate feasible solutions to reach global disarmament. Regular meetings or negotiations under times of crisis can be essential in reaching a common ground. Certain rules can be set for the nations of U.S. and Russia who are a part of the issue in order to abide in a situation of a crisis. One of them being a nation not using nuclear arms until the situation has been fully negotiated. These governments should be encouraged to sacrifice at least some of their powers in negotiations. This way, there wouldn’t be a constant threat posed by the two countries.

The issue can be referred to other organizations, such as the United Nations Security Council, for direct action to be taken instead of agreements or negotiations. Having values which tackle the issue in an international agreed manner, can be one of the factors in making disarmament negotiations more productive. Certain clauses can be submitted to decide the actions to be taken in crucial or threatening situations.

### **Further Reading**

* Trapped: NATO, Russia, and the Problem of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014-01/trapped-nato-russia-problem-tactical-nuclear-weapons)
* Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL32572.pdf)
* Urgent: Move U.S. Nuclear Weapons from Turkey (https://fas.org/category/tactical-nuclear-weapons/)

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