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**NATO Nuclear Reductions
and the Assurance of Central and Eastern European Allies**

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NATO Nuclear Reductions and the Assurance of Central and Eastern European Allies

I. Introduction

Recent years have seen a debate within NATO over the issue of whether U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Europe should be retained in their current status, reduced in number, or withdrawn from the Continent. Some countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, have advocated removal of the weapons. Others, notably member states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), are wary of changes in the nuclear posture of the alliance. The position of the United States and NATO as a whole is that future arms talks with Russia should include discussion of greater transparency, relocation, or reduction of nonstrategic nuclear arsenals. Russia has demanded a number of conditions for talks that indicate an unwillingness to begin negotiations anytime soon. These conditions include complete withdrawal of U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons from Europe before reductions are considered, discussion of limits on other types of arms, bringing additional countries into the talks, and full implementation of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which is scheduled for 2018.

Assuming negotiations eventually take place, this report examines the question of how the pursuit of limits on U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons might be balanced with the concerns of CEE allies regarding dangers posed by Russia and the value of nonstrategic nuclear weapons in mitigating those dangers. More specifically, how might nonstrategic nuclear weapons be reduced while assuring these countries of the credibility of NATO and U.S. commitments to their security?

The report begins by looking at the security environment as perceived by the eastern members of NATO. This context affects the type and extent of assurance needed. The next section describes the roles NATO and the United States play in assuring CEE allies of their security, but also points to some concerns those countries have about U.S. and NATO commitments. This is followed by two sections that outline the value CEE members attribute to nonstrategic nuclear weapons and the positions they take toward proposed limitations on the weapons. CEE allies believe changes in the nuclear posture of NATO could adversely affect their security, so the subsequent section outlines a number of means by which they are assured by NATO and the United States. The final section offers an assessment of whether the means of assuring the eastern allies could adequately compensate for reductions in U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons.

II. Russia as a Source of Insecurity for CEE Allies

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have a sense of insecurity that arises from their geography and history. They have suffered from their position between two powerful states, Germany to the west and Russia to the east (see the map in the appendix). “Few corners of Europe,” it has been observed, “have found themselves the focal points of geopolitical intrigue, war and invasion routes and the resulting violence and destruction as much as the medium-sized and small countries of this region.”¹ They spent half of the last century under foreign control, occupied or dominated by Nazi Germany in World War II and then satellites or parts of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In this century, they are allied with Germany and the other NATO countries, but their accession to the alliance is of recent vintage and they lie on its periphery, where they feel endangered by Russian revisionism in various forms. Their relative weakness has made imperative the support of friendly great powers—including France, Britain, and the United States—which at critical times in the past was not forthcoming, leaving them with a fear of abandonment. For these reasons, territorial defense and collective security are of utmost concern to CEE countries.

The current security situation of these countries is vastly improved over that of earlier decades. They are members of NATO and the European Union, aligned with Germany, linked to the United States, and generally enjoy a substantial degree of civil order. The Baltic states on the northeast edge of the Atlantic Alliance, for example, believe “their EU membership and integration into NATO and transatlantic security structures have transformed their national security and placed them in a more favorable position than ever before.”² Nonetheless, a threat of coercion and attack remains. In the eyes of CEE countries, that threat is posed largely by Russia.

CEE Region as a Zone of “Privileged Interests”

Key elements of the Russian leadership have never fully reconciled themselves to the downfall of the Soviet Union, the loss of the Soviet empire—particularly its holdings in Central and Eastern Europe—and the eastward expansion of NATO. In April 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin referred to the Soviet collapse as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”³ In August 2008, then-President Dmitry Medvedev claimed “privileged interests” (generally interpreted as meaning a sphere of influence) in regions bordering Russia.⁴ The Russian national security strategy issued in May 2009 pointed to the “unacceptability” of the extension of NATO membership and related military infrastructure to countries nearby, while the military doctrine published the following February categorized NATO enlargement as a “main external military danger.”⁵ In light of these attitudes and associated actions by Moscow, 20 former high officials from the CEE countries (presidents, foreign and defense ministers, and ambassadors) concluded in a July 2009 open letter to the Obama administration that,

Our hopes that relations with Russia would improve and that Moscow would finally accept our complete sovereignty and independence after joining NATO and the EU have not been fulfilled. Instead, Russia is back as a revisionist power pursuing a 19th-century agenda with 21st-century tactics and methods. At a global level, Russia has become, on most issues, a status-quo power. But at a regional level and vis-à-vis our nations, it increasingly acts as a revisionist one.⁶

Invasion of Georgia

The Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 greatly affected Central and Eastern European threat perceptions and security calculations. Russia was seen as ready to use force to maintain a sphere of influence in an area formerly under Soviet control. Protection of Russian citizens in separatist enclaves was offered as part of the justification for the invasion. The country attacked was seeking to join NATO and already had ties to the alliance through the Partnership for Peace program and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Russian victory was swift (even if important military deficiencies were revealed). The reaction by NATO failed to change the outcome of the conflict or even to impose significant penalties on Moscow. Newer members of NATO feared that they, too, could fall victim to Russian aggression of one sort or another, and that the response by their allies also would prove insufficient. As a consequence, they called for a renewed alliance commitment to collective and territorial defense (with less emphasis on preparations for operations outside the NATO area), and plans, exercises, and deployments to back it up.⁷ (These measures are discussed in Section VI.)

Conventional Military Power

Russian conventional military power in general is a source of concern for CEE countries. Announced Russian defense spending increased nearly seven-fold over the past decade, from 356 billion rubles in 2003 to a planned level of 2,346 billion rubles in 2013.⁸ Both the quantity and quality of Russian forces stationed near the borders of the Baltic states and Poland have increased in recent years.⁹ The overall superiority of NATO in the conventional military balance with Russia is less significant in the CEE region. Ongoing reform and modernization efforts by Moscow are intended to yield smaller, yet more mobile, high-tech, combat-ready, and professional Russian forces. The improvements “will allow the Russian military to more rapidly defeat its smaller neighbors and remain the dominant military force in the post-Soviet space, but they will not—and are not intended to—enable Moscow to conduct sustained operations against NATO collectively.”¹⁰ CEE countries do not disregard the threat of large-scale Russian military aggression, but consider it remote. Of greater worry are limited military attacks with the potential for escalation. Possible examples include an incursion with the ostensible aim of

protecting ethnic Russians in one of the Baltic states, a confrontation over the land links between Russia and its Kaliningrad exclave (the Baltic port and adjacent area hemmed in between Poland and Lithuania), a conflict between Russia and Ukraine that reached the borders of Poland, and a move designed to expose NATO weaknesses in providing defense for the allies in the east.¹¹ In the event of a small-scale military attack by Russia, some Polish officials fear, NATO “might need either to accept a short-term defeat or to threaten the use of unconventional weapons.”¹²

Zapad and Ladoga Exercises

Short of an outright attack, Russia can flex its military muscle in ways that intimidate CEE allies. A pair of exercises in August and September 2009 is a notable case in point.¹³ One, Zapad (“West”)-2009, was carried out with Belarus, a Russian ally. The exercise took place on Belarusian territory, near Poland and Lithuania, and in the Kaliningrad exclave. The other, Ladoga-2009, began near Lake Ladoga, outside St. Petersburg, and involved the Leningrad Military District, which covered the northwest portion of the Russia. The front line of the two exercises ran along the borders with Poland, the Baltic states, Finland, and Norway. Together they constituted the largest western military maneuvers by Russia since the end of the Cold War. At least 30,000 Russian and Belarusian soldiers, sailors, and airmen participated. The scenarios for the exercises reportedly had “terrorists” infiltrating Kaliningrad and Belarus from Lithuanian territory, while ethnic Poles mounted an uprising in western Belarus. Vilnius and Warsaw were complicit in these events. Russia and its ally responded with a large-scale amphibious landing to reinforce Kaliningrad, deployment of special forces in enemy rear areas, and operations an Estonian analyst read to mean “Lithuania would be cut off from Continental Europe and all three Baltic states would effectively be caught in a pocket.”¹⁴ NATO forces entered the conflict and invaded western Russia. When Russian conventional defenses faltered, a nuclear strike was delivered against Poland. (During the maneuvers, it should be noted, the Strategic Rocket Forces, the branch of the Russian armed forces responsible for nuclear-armed long-range ballistic missiles, held its own exercise, with “scenarios involving conventional and nuclear warfare.”)¹⁵

For the Polish foreign minister, the “scenario of repelling an invasion by NATO” was both “provocative and ridiculous,” exemplifying “the traditional geo-political thinking, based on the old fashioned concepts of sphere of influence and buffer zones [that] continues to resonate among some of the Russian elite.”¹⁶ A member of the Polish lower house protested that the exercises were “an attempt to put us in our place,” and added, “Don’t forget all this happened on the 70th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland.”¹⁷ Along this same line, an analyst with a state-funded Polish research center said the Ladoga exercise “brought to mind temporal and geographic analogies to the Red Army’s preparations to enter the three Baltic States and attack Finland.”¹⁸ Some saw another ominous parallel in Caucasus Frontier 2008, a series of exercises

held near the border of Georgia less than a month before the Russian invasion.¹⁹ When another Zapad exercise was conducted in September 2013, the chairman of the Lithuanian parliamentary committee on national security and defense characterized the maneuvers as “clearly aggressive and menacing” and believed they “confirmed the need for Lithuania to enhance NATO visibility in the region.”²⁰

Nuclear Threat

The mock nuclear strike of the 2009 exercises points up the tangible Russian nuclear threat eastern NATO members perceive. Russian nonstrategic nuclear capabilities are the focus of attention, particularly for the Balts and Poles. The nonstrategic capabilities include the nuclear weapons and aircraft and missiles for their delivery that are located in the Western Military District near the Baltic states, as well as delivery means and, it is suspected, nuclear weapons in the Kaliningrad area.²¹ A top Polish official has remarked that “[m]ost of Russia’s operational sub-strategic nuclear weapons are believed to be deployed close to Poland’s borders—right at NATO’s doorstep. Within striking distance of Warsaw.”²² During meetings in late 2010, the foreign minister of Lithuania raised with senior U.S. diplomatic and defense officials his concerns about Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons and afterward commented, “Being a NATO member, of course, someone could say, ‘Don’t worry.’ But when you’re living in the neighborhood, you should always be more cautious.”²³ A few months later, the head of the defense ministry in Vilnius echoed this sentiment, saying, “It’s in our interest that so many arms—including tactical nuclear weapons which present a threat to our existence—are not amassed all around our borders.”²⁴ Nearness to the Russian nonstrategic arsenal appears to make these CEE countries more alert to the security challenges the weapons pose.

The numerical superiority of Russian nonstrategic nuclear arms adds to the anxiety caused by their geographic proximity. In interviews with two U.S. specialists on European security, “[s]enior leaders in the Baltic states, Poland, and the Czech Republic...highlighted that Russia’s NSNW [nonstrategic nuclear weapons] in Europe outnumber U.S. NSNW systems deployed there by some order of magnitude.”²⁵ CEE leaders certainly recognize the imbalance as an important obstacle to negotiated limitations on U.S. and Russian nonstrategic weapons. They also may worry that the great disparity in nonstrategic nuclear capabilities could give Moscow political-psychological leverage with which to influence the decisions of NATO members, especially in a crisis.²⁶ And they may fear the Russian edge could have grave consequences for their countries in the event of conflict.

With regard to the last point, while the United States and NATO have been working to reduce the role nuclear weapons play in defense strategy, Russia has been moving in the opposite direction, a divergence noted in assessments made public by U.S. intelligence organizations.²⁷

Increased reliance has been placed on Russian nuclear forces to offset the weaknesses in conventional capabilities that emerged after the Soviet collapse.²⁸ Current Russian military doctrine reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in some conventional conflicts.²⁹ The chief of the Russian General Staff warned in a 2011 address that NATO enlargement was a major cause of tension, that “[t]he possibility of local armed conflict along the entire perimeter of the border has grown dramatically,” and that he “[could not] rule out [that], in certain circumstances, local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with nuclear weapons.”³⁰ In the view of a Lithuanian observer, “for Russia tactical nuclear warheads are operational weapons that they envisage using in regional conflicts if Russia feels sufficiently threatened. In other words, the threshold is incomparably lower than the one present in the Western countries.”³¹ Because of the Russian nuclear emphasis, there is Polish unease “that a future NATO-Russia conflict may not only quickly go nuclear, but that Poland would likely be a target for NSNW attacks were such a scenario to occur.”³²

Moscow has brandished its nuclear forces in attempts to coerce CEE countries, and, to a lesser extent, NATO as a whole. While the nuclear aspect of the exercises in 2009 did not go unnoticed in the eastern portion of the alliance, countries of the region on a number of other occasions have been the targets of more calculated—and crude—Russian nuclear threats.³³ In recent years, the threats have been intended to block deployment of missile defense components in Poland, the Czech Republic, and elsewhere. One such threat involves the movement of nuclear-capable Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles to Kaliningrad, from where Poland and the Baltic states could be struck.³⁴ In response to the planned deployment of long-range interceptors in Poland and a tracking radar in the Czech Republic (the Third Site system), President Medvedev announced in November 2008 that Russia would “deploy the Iskander missile system in the Kaliningrad Region to be able, if necessary, to neutralise the missile defence system.”³⁵ After plans changed, with shorter-range interceptors now scheduled for deployment in Poland and Romania (part of the European Phased Adaptive Approach, or EPAA, system), Medvedev in November 2011 repeated the threat, as did the chief of the Russian General Staff in April of the following year.³⁶ Though Iskander missiles apparently have yet to be deployed in Kaliningrad, they have been based near Luga, in the vicinity of Estonia and Latvia.³⁷ In interviews conducted by a Polish analyst in late 2011 and early 2012, CEE government officials and non-government experts, particularly in Poland and the Baltic states, were apprehensive about deployment of Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad.³⁸ During a roundtable discussion in March 2011, a Baltic participant told attendees from other NATO countries, “We like the reset [in relations with Russia], we like [New] START, however, one can argue that our (Baltic) security situation has not improved...actually worsened with the deployment of the Iskander missiles...I feel we are in some ways in a worse position (in terms of military balance) than at the end of the Cold War.”³⁹

Russian officials have been blunt as to how Iskander missiles and other nuclear-capable strike systems would be used to “neutralize” missile defense sites in CEE countries. When a foreign reporter at a 2007 press conference asked President Putin whether the presence of the sites in Poland and the Czech Republic would result in the refocusing of Russian nuclear forces on “European targets,” Putin replied, “Certainly....Of course we must have new targets. And determining precisely which means [ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, or other weapons] will be used to destroy the installations that...represent a potential threat...is a matter of technology.”⁴⁰ The commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces subsequently warned, “I do not rule out that our political and military administration may target some of our intercontinental ballistic missiles at the...missile defense facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic.”⁴¹ A spokesman for the Russian General Staff later was more explicit: “By hosting these [missile defense interceptors], Poland is making itself a target. This is 100 percent [certain]. It becomes a target for attack. Such targets are destroyed as a first priority.”⁴² More recently, the then-chief of the General Staff reissued the threat, telling a May 2012 international conference in Moscow that, “Considering the destabilizing nature of the (American) ABM [anti-ballistic missile] system, namely the creation of inflicting a disarming (nuclear) strike with impunity, a decision on pre-emptive deployment of assault weapons could be taken when the situation gets harder.”⁴³ While Russian threats have failed to reverse the decisions of CEE countries to support and host missile defense deployments, they have demonstrated the vulnerability of these NATO members to attempts at nuclear blackmail by Moscow.

Other Means of Coercion

CEE countries also find troubling four other means by which Russia seeks to assert its “privileged interests” in their region. These are airspace intrusions, cyberattack, oil shutoffs, and activities by the sizable Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia. Incursions by military aircraft in the airspace of “most European countries along the Russian border,” but particularly over the Baltic states, are seen as a way for Russia not only to gather intelligence on the reaction time of NATO air defenses, but also to remind neighbors of its armed might.⁴⁴ Lithuania fell prey to a cyberattack in June 2008, following the passage of legislation banning public displays of Soviet and Nazi symbols.⁴⁵ Russian oil shipments to the Czech Republic slowed the next month after Prague formally agreed to host the radar for the Third Site missile defense.⁴⁶ The large numbers of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia—nearly 30 percent of the population in each country—increase the ability of Moscow to influence the political and commercial affairs of the two states. Defense of the rights and interests of these “compatriots” also could provide the pretext for more direct Russian intervention.⁴⁷ In response to an April 2007 decision by the government in Tallinn to relocate a Soviet World War II memorial from the center of the capital to a military cemetery, Russians, both outside and inside Estonia, resorted to three of the aforementioned methods of intimidation: local ethnic Russians rioted; the

government, banking sector, and mass media were subjected to cyberattacks; and rail shipments of Russian oil were interrupted.⁴⁸

Additional Points Regarding the Perceived Russian Danger

As with the rest of NATO, countries of the CEE region do not all have identical perceptions of the security problems Russia presents. The Baltic states and Poland have shown the greatest concern about these problems. “[T]he official attitude of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia,” according to one careful observer, “has been less emotional and less cautious than that of the countries in the northern part of Central Europe.”⁴⁹ Even here, however, Prague appears more sensitive to danger from Russia than Budapest or Bratislava, perhaps in part because of the threats Moscow made to prevent deployment of the Third Site radar.⁵⁰ Hungary and Slovakia nonetheless “share the Polish and Czech perception that traditional risks in Europe have not altogether disappeared.”⁵¹ With regard to other CEE NATO members—Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Croatia, and Slovenia—research for this report uncovered little evidence concerning the extent to which they see a contemporary security threat from Russia.

Finally, brief mention should be made of CEE views regarding the potential danger from Iran. In comparison to Russia, Iran represents a secondary threat for most or all of Central and Eastern Europe. Iran has yet to build a nuclear weapon, making the danger of nuclear coercion or attack by Tehran prospective rather than immediate. CEE countries view U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons and NATO dual-capable aircraft (DCA) as constituting a hedge against such an eventuality.⁵² Iran today possesses medium-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching Bulgaria and Romania, and seeks missiles with longer range.⁵³ The EPAA defense system is intended primarily to protect CEE countries and the rest of NATO against Iranian missiles.⁵⁴ Given their present vulnerability to these missiles, Bulgaria and Romania perhaps may feel the threat more acutely and appreciate the defensive counter more strongly than do other members of the alliance.⁵⁵ At least for now, the more prevalent view may be that expressed by the Polish foreign minister: “If the mullahs have a target list we believe we are quite low on it.”⁵⁶

III. NATO and the United States as Sources of Assurance for CEE Allies

Beginning at the turn of the century, CEE countries joined NATO in three successive groups: the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia five years later; and Albania and Croatia five years after that. NATO membership and related political-military ties with the United States are fundamental to the post-Cold War strategies these countries have adopted to maintain their state sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity, particularly with regard to the dangers of Russian

interference, intimidation, or attack. The security relationships with NATO and the United States thus are the foundation for the assurance of allied countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Importance of Article 5

From the perspective of Tallinn, Warsaw, Prague, and other eastern capitals, the cornerstone of that foundation is Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (or Washington Treaty), which established the alliance. That provision, the collective defense clause, reads,

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them... shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.⁵⁷

This pledge is renewed in the latest Strategic Concept for NATO, the long-term alliance road map that leaders of the member states adopted at the 2010 Lisbon summit. “The greatest responsibility of the Alliance,” says the document, “is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5.” Collective defense is an “essential core task” related to that end. For collective defense, “NATO members will always assist each other against attack, in accordance with Article 5.... That commitment remains firm and binding.”⁵⁸ During the formulation of the Strategic Concept, “allies in Central and Eastern Europe pushed forcefully for Article 5 collective defense to be reaffirmed as NATO’s core mission.”⁵⁹ This reflected their worries that preparedness for collective defense against armed attack in the Euro-Atlantic region could be undermined by missions outside the NATO area (International Security Assistance Force operations in Afghanistan, for example), reductions in the military capabilities of allied countries (especially forces for timely reinforcement of CEE defenses), efforts by some allies to improve relations with Russia as a priority objective, and a lack of political will within the alliance to come to their aid *in extremis*. The importance CEE countries attach to strengthening the “all for one and one for all” commitment has led them to be dubbed the “Article 5 Coalition” and the “Collective Defenders.”⁶⁰

United States as Principal Security Guarantor

The United States is the NATO ally the CEE countries regard as the principal guarantor of their security. They give the United States rather than the West Europeans the greater share of the credit for their liberation from Soviet dominance and subsequent integration into NATO and other Western institutions.⁶¹ For them, the United States is the NATO partner most likely to give

due recognition to their interests; indeed, at a defense workshop in Brussels, a Central European participant remarked that “in [CEE] countries many observers judge the United States ‘more willing to send soldiers to die for Tallinn or Warsaw’ than any Western European Ally.”⁶² U.S. leadership within NATO, from their perspective, can guide and expedite alliance deliberations, including decision-making in a crisis in which one or more CEE members face major aggression. The diverse conventional and nuclear strength of the United States is viewed as indispensable to counter Russian military capabilities and diminish the shadow they cast. And the presence of U.S. conventional forces and nuclear weapons on the European continent are considered necessary both to secure and display the American commitment to allied defense. As a high-ranking Polish official once put it, the United States spends “more on [its] military than the rest of the world put together. [It has] unique credibility as regards security. So of course everybody assumes that countries that have U.S. soldiers on their territory do not get invaded.”⁶³

NATO consequently is valued to a large extent as the organizational conduit for the “transatlantic link” that couples the United States to the security of the eastern members of NATO and the rest of the alliance.⁶⁴ “Central Europeans believe that their successful defense requires direct US military involvement,” a former official of the Slovak defense ministry writes, and “tend to associate any weakening of the transatlantic link with erosion of their own security.”⁶⁵ A diplomat from one of the CEE countries underscores the transatlantic link as a chief benefit of NATO in this way: “Becoming a NATO member for us was an important part of a package deal: Democracy, freedom of speech, EU membership and NATO membership. All are part of the Western package. NATO membership is an important part of that, because it ties the U.S. to the defence of our territory.”⁶⁶

In some cases, CEE countries have sought forms of bilateral security cooperation with the United States to augment the NATO Article 5 commitment to their defense.⁶⁷ This indicates significant faith in U.S. security guarantees and some doubt about the reliability of NATO as a whole. Poland, for example, used negotiations on the deployment of the Third Site interceptors to secure a broader agreement on defense cooperation with the United States. The “Declaration on Strategic Cooperation” issued in August 2008, shortly after the Russian invasion of Georgia, was characterized by the two countries as “[w]ithin the context of, and consistent with, both the North Atlantic Treaty and the U.S.-Poland strategic partnership.” It called for establishment of a high-level “Strategic Cooperation Consultative Group” to discuss defense matters of mutual concern; rotational deployment to Poland of a U.S. Patriot air and missile battery and 100-man crew for joint training and exercises; U.S. assistance with Polish military modernization; and a closer defense-industrial relationship.⁶⁸ Though the Third Site plan later was abandoned, U.S.-Polish bilateral security cooperation continues in other areas.

Concerns About NATO and U.S. Commitments

The assurance now provided by the bonds with NATO and the United States is much valued by the CEE states, but also considered insufficient. In addition to the worrisome behavior of Russia, their strategic anxiety has causes internal to the alliance.

Distractions from the Article 5 Mission

One source of concern is what they see as distractions from NATO planning and preparation for territorial defense, particularly defense of their countries against aggressive acts by Moscow. Many of the security dangers listed in the Strategic Concept and the related Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) report are viewed as valid but lesser threats, the mitigation of which can divert allied attention and resources from Article 5 contingencies involving Russia. These dangers include failed states, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation, terrorism, arms and drug trafficking, piracy, interdiction of global energy routes, and climate change.⁶⁹ “[C]ountries from Western Europe have different threats,” explains the chief of the Polish General Staff. “Most of their threats are linked more with domestic issues such as immigration, terrorist attacks or extremism, whereas, countries from Central-Eastern Europe while realizing those challenges, are also thinking in terms of traditional threats, which are very much connected with NATO article 5.”⁷⁰ One analyst reports that Warsaw “clearly expects NATO to adapt itself to some of the new challenges, but surely not to all of them.”⁷¹ The Baltic states likewise are uneasy about expansion of the “the scope of [the] Alliance’s activities, involving military...and non-military [and] regional and global challenges.”⁷²

Out-of-area operations, notably NATO participation in the decade-long counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan, have been the principal distraction for the alliance, from the perspective of members in Central and Eastern Europe.⁷³ CEE countries see benefit in the contributions they have made to NATO reconstruction, training, and special forces units in Afghanistan. They hope this support for the alliance enhances their standing with older members and thereby increases the likelihood of allied help when needed.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, they believe conduct of out-of-area operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere can weaken preparedness for conflicts in Europe. During a June 2012 workshop at the NATO Defense College, a Lithuanian participant complained that he was “not very reassured” by claims that capabilities for territorial defense had not diminished as a consequence of emphasis on expeditionary forces intended for other theaters. “[E]xpeditionary forces are trained to deal with poorly armed and trained insurgents,” he said, “which is not the same as determined conventional armies.”⁷⁵ Or as the Estonian permanent representative to the North Atlantic Council put it, “training to fight in an Afghan village does not translate into being able to stop a tank in an Article 5 scenario.”⁷⁶ Worries about out-of-area distractions undoubtedly have lessened with plans to complete withdrawal of allied combat

forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, but the possibility of future expeditionary operations remains.

U.S. Rebalance to Asia

As alliance involvement in Afghanistan becomes limited, the strategic focus of the United States is not shifting to Europe. Instead, in the words of a former Latvian defense minister, “America’s defense and security gaze is moving towards Asia.”⁷⁷ A “rebalance” or “pivot” to Asia was announced by U.S. officials in late 2011 and early 2012.⁷⁸ The change reflects the status of the United States as a Pacific power, the growing economic importance of the region, the economic and military rise of China, the absence of a multilateral defense framework (like NATO), and the potential for disputes over territory, resources, and maritime rights to escalate to armed conflict. As part of the rebalance, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel has explained, the United States will “prioritize [its military] posture, activities, and investments in the Asia-Pacific.” Two Marine Expeditionary Forces and an Army infantry division will return from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan to bases in the Pacific theater. An Army corps will be “aligned” to the Asia-Pacific region. Sixty percent of the Navy fleet will be based in the Pacific by the end of the decade. Sixty percent of Air Force overseas-based forces will be apportioned to the region. And U.S. Pacific Command will have priority for deployment of the most advanced capabilities, including F-22 and F-35 fighter aircraft and Virginia-class attack submarines.⁷⁹ Europe necessarily becomes a lower priority.

The rebalance is enabled by the belief in Washington, even if not explicitly stated, that for its European allies, “[w]hatever troubles might arise, the institutional scaffolding of Euro-Atlantic structures, together with the gradually decreasing U.S. military footprint, should be adequate to quiet Europe’s storms, particularly given the region’s likely geostrategic quiescence for the foreseeable future.”⁸⁰ This belief is not, however, shared in much of Central and Eastern Europe. The move caused “massive anxiety” in the region, where it has been interpreted as the United States “pivoting out” of Europe, particularly Central Europe.⁸¹ “The Eastern Europeans see it as a threat,” observes a Western European ambassador to NATO.⁸² The perceived threat is that the strategic reorientation will reduce the willingness and wherewithal of the United States to ensure their security. It should be added that a Polish analyst thinks the rebalance could lead the United States to expend little or no effort to resist future calls for the withdrawal of its nonstrategic nuclear weapons from NATO countries.⁸³

Possible Hazard of Better Relations with Russia

With regard to priorities within the Atlantic Alliance, CEE countries have recurrent apprehension that pursuit of better relations with Russia will come at their expense; as a Polish defense official once said, “The smell of Yalta is always with us.”⁸⁴ They appreciate the potential for diplomatic

interchange and arms agreements—in combination with military measures—to help manage the security dangers presented by Moscow. But their sense of these dangers is greater than that of allies to the west and they worry that efforts at engagement with Russia can go too far. For example, CEE members, which consider further NATO enlargement advantageous to their own security, viewed the decision at the April 2008 Bucharest summit to postpone Membership Action Plans for Georgia and Ukraine as an unwise concession to Russia, which opposes the accession of either country to the alliance. They also felt that Russia paid no serious price for its invasion of Georgia four months later, and that the return to more normal relations with Moscow, including the U.S. “reset” policy, was at best premature.⁸⁵ The September 2009 decision by the United States to cancel plans for the Third Site interceptors in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic, in favor of the EPAA defense, was widely perceived in Central and Eastern Europe as another sacrifice to the reset with Russia.⁸⁶ Poles and Czechs reacted strongly against the decision, because the planned missile defense components were seen as symbols of the U.S. security commitment, and because consultations prior to the announcement were judged inadequate. The deputy head of the National Security Bureau in Poland publicly suggested the change represented “appeasement,” while the foreign minister concluded, “if we are to look to somebody, we have to look to ourselves.”⁸⁷ Similarly, the Czech prime minister under whom the radar agreement was negotiated said, “it is not good news for the Czech state, for Czech freedom and independence. This puts us in a position wherein we are not firmly anchored in terms of partnership, security and alliance, and that’s a certain threat.”⁸⁸ These experiences and others are one reason CEE countries are likely to be leery of negotiations with Moscow to place limits on nonstrategic nuclear weapons.

Consequences of Declines in Defense Spending of NATO Countries

The prevailing trend in the defense expenditures of NATO members is yet another security worry in CEE capitals.⁸⁹ Military spending by allies is treated as an indicator of their commitment as well as capability to meet Article 5 obligations. “Allied spending, required to maintain NATO’s defense capability, is a matter of trust in the organization,” the Estonian president remarked to the NATO Military Committee chairman during a 2012 meeting in Tallinn.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, fiscal austerity in response to the prolonged economic slump has resulted in defense cuts throughout the alliance. Defense spending in most non-U.S. NATO countries has declined steadily since 2008.⁹¹ At present, only Poland and Norway are increasing their defense budgets.⁹² In 2012, just four of the 28 members of NATO—the United States, the United Kingdom, Greece, and Estonia—allocated two percent or more of gross domestic product to defense, the guideline endorsed by the alliance in 2006.⁹³ It should be noted that, as an analysis by a Bratislava-based research institute acknowledges, “[t]he worst performers [in terms of defense spending] are heavily concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe” (with the group rounded out by Belgium, Italy, and Spain).⁹⁴

The consequences of cutbacks have been reductions in force structure, readiness, modernization, and operational effectiveness.⁹⁵ Operation Unified Protector, the 2011 NATO air campaign against the Qadhafi regime in Libya, a distinctly inferior military opponent, revealed alliance deficiencies in aerial refueling, reconnaissance, defense suppression, and strike capabilities, among other shortcomings.⁹⁶ CEE countries fear that the ability of NATO to counter aggression against its own territory also has been adversely affected by the extended decline in defense spending.⁹⁷ This fear appears to have some justification. For example, in early 2012, the Norwegian defense minister, citing results from exercises of NATO conventional forces, warned an American audience,

Article 5 is not in such a good shape. I'm not talking about political will, but the actual ability to deliver if something happens in the trans-Atlantic theater of a more classical type of aggression. I think we're getting worse at it because of the many cuts happening in a lot of European countries. If we're not smart (defense cuts) may lead to a further weakening of the core ability to defend ourselves.⁹⁸

Of special concern to CEE allies is the ability of the rest of NATO to dispatch reinforcements to their countries, particularly the Baltic states, in a war-prone confrontation or armed conflict. Because of the limitations of their armed forces and the lack of allied forces on their territories—the result, in part, of efforts to dampen Russian opposition to NATO enlargement—CEE members depend for their defense on the help of NATO forces sent from abroad in times of crisis.⁹⁹ They are troubled that spending cuts and related capability reductions may make reinforcement difficult in the event of an impending or ongoing Russian attack.¹⁰⁰ And, contrary to the view of the Norwegian defense minister, some CEE officials also express “apprehensions that NATO would not be able to rapidly reach consensus on providing assistance in the case of an unexpected or limited-scale military attack,” just as, they say, some allies hesitated in both 1991 and 2003 to respond to Turkish requests for Patriot batteries to counter the Iraqi ballistic missile threat.¹⁰¹ Worries about reinforcement have been capsulized by the Polish prime minister in these words: “Poland and Poles do not want to be in alliances in which assistance comes at some point later—it is no good when assistance comes to dead people. Poland wants to be in alliances where assistance comes in the very first hours of—knock on wood—any possible conflict.”¹⁰² Another Central European has argued that uncertainty about how quickly NATO would respond to an Article 5 contingency is one reason CEE allies lean against withdrawal of U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons from the Continent and seek more U.S. military involvement in their region.¹⁰³

The military contribution of the United States is, of course, essential to the defense not only of Central and Eastern Europe but of NATO as a whole. While defense spending by non-U.S. allies declined over the past several years, U.S. spending increased. As a consequence, between 2007 and 2012, the U.S. share of NATO defense expenditures increased from 68 percent to 72 percent.¹⁰⁴ In 2011, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates admonished the European allies that

“there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress—and in the American body politic writ large—to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense.”¹⁰⁵ More recently, Secretary of Defense Hagel repeated the warning in a June 2013 meeting with NATO defense ministers.¹⁰⁶ The message has been heard by CEE countries, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, who are “anxious that without proper European defense expenditures, the U.S. may lose interest in NATO.”¹⁰⁷ To what extent they heed it is another matter.

The implications of future reductions in U.S. defense budgets are also a source of unease for CEE allies. As budgets become more austere and force structure and investments are rebalanced toward the Asia-Pacific region, the United States is reducing forces in Europe, including two Army brigade combat teams, an Army corps headquarters, an Air Force fighter squadron and an air control squadron. With these reductions, troop strength will drop from some 80,000 to roughly 70,000.¹⁰⁸ While the United States will substitute rotational units for some of the forward-stationed forces, and U.S. officials have been at pains to convince the NATO allies that these changes do not arise from a diminished commitment to their defense, “[f]or many Central Europeans, the decision to withdraw two of the . . . four Brigade Combat Teams . . . translated into the perception of a decreased ability to commit heavy forces to a NATO Article 5 operation from the outset.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, “Central Europeans,” four CEE analysts note, “get nervous when the US tinkers with its military bases in Europe. They regard the installations as a symbol of US commitment to their defense and study each shift for signs that Washington’s resolution is waning.”¹¹⁰ And after a series of meetings with officials and analysts in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, a team of British researchers concluded, “This reduction of US conventional forces in Europe is a matter of concern to policy-makers in the Baltic region, and it is not unrelated to Baltic State views on the nuclear policy debate in Europe [that is, the discussion over the future of nonstrategic nuclear weapons].”¹¹¹

IV. CEE Views on the Security Value of Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons

Since the late 1940s, countries of NATO have been beneficiaries of a U.S. nuclear guarantee. With the guarantee, the United States pledges to use its nuclear forces to deter or, if necessary, defeat major aggression against these allies, a form of support often referred to as “extended deterrence” or the “nuclear umbrella.” The guarantee is backed by both U.S. strategic nuclear forces—nuclear-armed long-range bombers, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)—and U.S. nonstrategic nuclear capabilities based in Europe. U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons were first deployed in Western Europe a few years after the founding of NATO. Delivery systems for these weapons have included artillery, surface-to-surface missiles, and aircraft. Under “dual-key” arrangements with

a number of countries, the weapons are under U.S. custody, but their delivery means are owned and operated by host nations; this gives allies shared control over nuclear use. In a narrow military sense, the presence of nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Europe during the Cold War was intended to inhibit the Soviet bloc from massing conventional forces for breakthroughs in NATO defenses, because concentrated, rather than dispersed, forces would have presented lucrative targets for nuclear attacks. Nonstrategic nuclear forces could have been employed against enemy armor formations, their fire support, lines of communications, and other targets. But allied countries understandably had even less interest in waging a nuclear war in Europe than in fighting another continental conventional conflict. Consequently, the alliance emphasized the deterrent role of nonstrategic nuclear weapons. The weapons provided a powerful local manifestation of the U.S. security commitment, helped offset the conventional superiority of the Warsaw Pact, offered proportionate options for responding to Soviet use of theater nuclear weapons, and confronted Soviet leaders with the prospect that a major offensive could precipitate nuclear escalation, whether deliberate or unintended, with all its daunting costs and risks. Nonstrategic nuclear weapons served as an escalation link to use of the U.S. strategic nuclear forces, the risk Kremlin leaders were expected to find most deterring.¹¹²

Since the end of the Cold War, the nonstrategic nuclear capabilities of NATO have contracted in several dimensions. The number of deployed weapons has decreased by more than 90 percent.¹¹³ Rather than the few thousand weapons that once were deployed, just “a few hundred” remain in Europe, according to public statements by U.S. and NATO officials.¹¹⁴ (This contrasts with the 2,000 to 4,000 nonstrategic nuclear weapons Russia retains, as estimated in unclassified sources cited by Defense Department representatives.)¹¹⁵ The types of nuclear systems have decreased from five to one—dual-capable aircraft with gravity bombs. The readiness of the dual-capable aircraft has decreased, with “months” instead of “hours/days” now needed to place most or all of the planes on alert. The number of storage sites for the weapons has decreased by roughly 80 percent.¹¹⁶ And the number of NATO countries with U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons on their soil has decreased from seven to five, according to information cited in a Congressional Research Service report.¹¹⁷

Significant reductions in capabilities have been accompanied by some simplification in the alliance rationale for nonstrategic nuclear weapons, with both kinds of change attributable to the disappearance of the grave dangers of the Cold War. The Strategic Concept and subsequent DDPR essentially conclude that NATO “remain[s] a nuclear alliance” because “nuclear weapons exist.”¹¹⁸ The military utility of nonstrategic nuclear weapons and concepts, plans, and preparations regarding their defensive use receive little attention in public discussions (and perhaps in restricted exchanges as well). Deterrence continues to be their central purpose, but many in the alliance, mainly in the older member states, wonder, “Deterrence of what?” At the same time, the assurance value of nonstrategic nuclear weapons as symbols of the U.S. security

commitment and as means of promoting alliance cohesion is accorded increased weight, particularly by allies in Central and Eastern Europe.

An understanding of the political-military value CEE allies assign to nonstrategic nuclear weapons is necessary to appreciate their reactions to proposals for redeployment, reduction, or removal of the weapons, and to determine what compensatory options might assure these allies if NATO were to pursue such proposals. In brief, countries on the eastern rim of the alliance see its nonstrategic nuclear capabilities as having four principal security benefits: 1) reinforcing the transatlantic link between the United States and NATO-Europe; 2) creating burden-sharing arrangements that strengthen alliance ties; 3) counterbalancing comparable Russian capabilities; and 4) hedging against potential future threats. These benefits are, of course, recognized elsewhere in the alliance. But, with the exception of the last, they appear to be more real for allies in the CEE region because of the previously discussed concerns those countries have regarding Russian threats to their security and NATO and U.S. commitments to their defense.

Reinforcement of the Transatlantic Link

As discussed earlier, the transatlantic link with the United States was a primary motivation of countries in Central and Eastern Europe to become members of NATO. With the transatlantic link comes the extended deterrence of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. And in CEE capitals, nonstrategic nuclear weapons are considered an essential part of the transatlantic link and extended deterrence.¹¹⁹ Shortly before the May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, an official in the Hungarian defense ministry argued,

The preservation of NATO's credible nuclear capabilities remains a key pillar of collective defense and solidarity between Allies. We continue to believe that the forward deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe as well as existing burden-sharing arrangements are important embodiments of the transatlantic relationship. Therefore, we see no pressing need for significant changes to these current arrangements.... The Alliance's present posture is appropriate in light of the uncertainties and challenges we face....¹²⁰

Along the same line, the Estonian foreign minister has said, "The placement of American nuclear weapons in Europe preserves close transatlantic ties and allows for greater flexibility in deterrence."¹²¹

Nonstrategic nuclear weapons, in addition to forward-deployed U.S. conventional forces, help anchor the transatlantic link to NATO-Europe. The deterrent and assurance value of a forward military presence is well recognized. U.S. forces deployed abroad do more than increase the frontline combat power of allies. They present a salient and proximate sign that the United

States has a strong interest in the continued safety of those countries. Permanently stationed forces generally seem to have more assurance value than temporary deployments, in part because they are unlikely to be withdrawn on short notice. Forward deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons offers a tangible assurance that allies are covered by the nuclear umbrella. Nonstrategic nuclear weapons on NATO territory are a concrete reminder of the continuing U.S. commitment to the defense of Europe at a time when military spending cuts, force reductions, and the rebalance to Asia are raising doubts in Central and Eastern Europe about the strength of that commitment. Further diminution in the U.S. nuclear presence could be read as indicating, or encouraging, less U.S. support for the alliance. “[R]educing the presence of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe would add to the concerns expressed by many European leaders about America’s long-term commitment to the continent,” caution former defense ministers from Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.¹²² An official of a CEE national delegation at NATO asserts that instead, “We need visible options. DCA are very important as a visible commitment of unity and solidarity.”¹²³

The symbolic, assurance value of the U.S. nuclear weapons based in Europe should not be discounted. The psychology of proximity cuts both ways. Just as the Poles and Balts find unnerving the nonstrategic nuclear weapons based near their borders with Russia, they and others in the eastern part of NATO also feel more secure with weapons of similar type located in allied countries on the Continent. Russian longer-range nuclear-armed delivery vehicles can wreak at least as much destruction, and U.S. strategic nuclear forces can inflict more devastating retaliation, but the relative physical remoteness of these arms also seems to make the danger they present (from those of Russia) or the assurance they offer (from those of the United States) more remote in the minds of CEE allies. All this perhaps is inexplicable from a strictly military point of view, but nonetheless appears to be the reality of the situation. (A similar psychology, it should be noted, may also lay behind some of the support in South Korea for the return of U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons to the peninsula.)¹²⁴ Assurance is a matter of maintaining the confidence of allies in their safety and in the commitments the United States and other security partners make to their defense. It ultimately depends on what real-world government leaders believe, not what *Homo strategicus* would calculate.

As noted, nonstrategic nuclear weapons long have been seen as the part of the transatlantic link that couples the remote U.S.-based strategic nuclear forces to the defense of NATO, even if the nature of the coupling now is usually left undefined (another aspect of the simplification of their *raison d’être*). CEE members subscribe to the alliance position that, “The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States.”¹²⁵ The Czech permanent representative to NATO, for example, has highlighted the significance of the U.S. nuclear umbrella in these terms: “the extension of the deterrence by the United States over the allies is crucial...without the United States we would have a very different alliance, if at all. And indeed, the extended deterrence is a very important part of keeping the alliance together.”¹²⁶ Within the extended deterrent, U.S. strategic nuclear

forces are the distant element, while U.S. nonstrategic weapons are its local presence. The reasoning of CEE allies seems to be that the local weapons, through the shared nuclear characteristic, connect the distant weapons to the security of NATO territory. There is little evidence their thinking has been influenced by the “escalation linkages” between forward-deployed nuclear weapons and U.S.-based strategic nuclear forces that were elaborated during the Cold War. The coupling of nonstrategic and strategic weapons instead is described by statements like that of a CEE ambassador to NATO: “Nuclear deterrence by the US and through NATO and with the presence of American warheads in Europe is the ultimate test of NATO’s credibility.”¹²⁷

Of course, NATO also acknowledges the contributions of the British and French independent strategic nuclear forces to alliance security, but CEE countries do not place them in the same category as those of the United States.¹²⁸ This was evident in an April 2013 Carnegie Endowment panel discussion on assurance, when a Polish analyst and former official commented,

for Central Europeans, the United States remains key when it comes to providing assurance and extended deterrence in the NATO context and in the European context. Sorry to French or U.K. participants who might be here...but this nuclear capabilities and other capabilities don’t exactly do the job of assuring us about our security. And when it comes to this assurance, it’s the political commitment, plus the mix of capabilities—as simple as that.¹²⁹

One of his countrymen expressed the same sentiment in even less diplomatic terms during an earlier meeting at the NATO Defense College: “Who outside France or Britain would believe their extended deterrence?”¹³⁰ The comments of both Poles are consistent with the point made in the previous section that the United States, not Britain, France, or Germany, is considered by the CEE countries their most important protector. The remarks also call to mind the observation by a former State Department official and a Czech political figure that, “History has taught these nations never to be caught alone in a dark alley with Germany or Russia—or to rely on France or the United Kingdom for national salvation... They have concluded that keeping America engaged is the best option for small and medium-sized countries in their situation.”¹³¹

Contribution to Alliance Burden-Sharing and Cohesion

CEE allies view the risk- and responsibility-sharing arrangements associated with NATO nonstrategic nuclear capabilities as supporting the transatlantic link with the United States and the cohesion of the alliance overall.¹³² These arrangements include hosting of nuclear weapons and dual-capable aircraft at air bases in some non-CEE countries, provision by those same allies of dual-capable aircraft and aircrews certified for nuclear missions, nonnuclear support of DCA

missions, and participation by all NATO members except France in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), the senior body which develops the nuclear policy and posture of the alliance. Through the DCA-related contributions, allies directly support the nuclear deterrent extended by the United States, rather than simply enjoy its protection, thus lending a degree of reciprocity to the transatlantic link. Involvement by nonnuclear member states in activities associated with the nuclear deterrent foster cohesion by reducing the likelihood of differences with those allies that do possess nuclear weapons and by giving the nonnuclear members greater credibility in NATO nuclear deliberations. Collective participation in nuclear decision-making, maintenance of the nuclear posture, and conduct of nuclear missions also can aid deterrence by confronting an adversary with a united front.¹³³

These views are apparent in statements made by various officials and other representative of the CEE allies. For example, in 2011, the then-defense minister of Estonia told a U.S. Strategic Command audience that “the nuclear burden sharing arrangement in NATO embodies the ultimate level of commitment and coordination between allies.”¹³⁴ That same year, a participant in a Tallinn roundtable on nuclear weapons and Baltic security referred to the NPG as the “spinal cord of the Alliance.”¹³⁵ At an alliance workshop held the previous year in Rome, a Polish participant warned that removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe also would eliminate the nuclear consultations and exercises that constituted “one of the pillars of the Alliance.”¹³⁶ And during a more recent workshop in the same series, an attendee from Lithuania maintained that “there is no better way to communicate deterrence than through the DCA arrangement.”¹³⁷

While CEE countries are strong supporters of nuclear burden-sharing, they themselves are not hosts to nonstrategic nuclear weapons or dual-capable aircraft. In the 1997 “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation,” NATO member states declared “they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members, nor any need to change any aspect of NATO’s nuclear posture or nuclear policy—and do not foresee any future need to do so.”¹³⁸ The Founding Act was intended to guide NATO-Russian relations and the “three no’s” were included to reassure Moscow about the military consequences of NATO enlargement (as noted, the Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians joined the alliance two years later).¹³⁹ This restriction has been “a source of irritation for several of the ‘new’ members.”¹⁴⁰ Some Poles, for example, protest that the “three no’s” make for an alliance with “dual membership,” “secondary membership,” and “better or worse membership,” all of which means “unequal security status” for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁴¹ Polish officials are reported to have expressed interest in redeployment on their territory of nuclear weapons and dual-capable aircraft that might be withdrawn from elsewhere in NATO.¹⁴² Even though the “three no’s” represent a political commitment rather than a legal obligation, and the Western drafters of the document recognized that NATO “needed to be able to abandon [the constraints of the Founding Act] if the security environment took a turn for the worse,”¹⁴³ it is unlikely that conditions in the foreseeable future will deteriorate to

such an extent that the CEE states press for a local nuclear presence and the alliance rescinds the restriction. As a final point, it is interesting to note that a Lithuanian observer has cited the second part of the “three no’s” clause—“nor any need to change any aspect of NATO’s nuclear posture or nuclear policy”—to argue against the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. nonstrategic weapons from Europe.¹⁴⁴

Some CEE members do contribute to the alliance nuclear mission through a program called SNOWCAT—“support of nuclear operations with conventional air tactics.” In the event nuclear-armed DCA were ordered to carry out an operation, countries participating in SNOWCAT could provide support in the form of aircraft for in-flight refueling, suppression of enemy air defenses, search and rescue for downed aircrews, and other tasks. According to open sources, more than a dozen allied countries are part of SNOWCAT, including four from the CEE region—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.¹⁴⁵

Counterbalance to Russian Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons

In addition to their perceived role in strengthening the transatlantic link and alliance cohesion, nonstrategic nuclear weapons are viewed by the eastern allies as a counter to the weapons of similar type in the Russian arsenal. As discussed previously, CEE countries feel menaced by both the nearness and number of Russian weapons. U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe and their means of delivery are not strictly equivalent to the Russian capabilities in either characteristic. The weapons and dual-capable aircraft are not present in the countries that see foreign nuclear arms “right at NATO’s doorstep,” and size of the nonstrategic weapons inventory for NATO is on the order of one-tenth that of Russia. Nonetheless, under present circumstances, CEE allies consider some weapons better than none and weapons somewhere on the Continent better than none at all. For Central and Eastern Europeans, “part of the reason for retaining US nuclear weapons on European soil is their perceived value in deterring any potential external attack from or intimidation by Russia.”¹⁴⁶ NATO nonstrategic nuclear capabilities cannot stop Russian attempts at intimidation; previous nuclear threats to block missile defense deployments and other coercive gambits by Moscow are the proof. But they may help prevent more severe blackmail, remind CEE leaders of U.S. and NATO security commitments, and encourage those leaders to resist Russian pressure. The danger of a major Russian attack is viewed as unlikely, but then such a contingency also was assigned a relatively low probability during the Cold War. CEE allies worry about more limited armed aggression and the possibility of escalation. Defense experts in the region consequently believe that “capabilities [for deterrence should] still include the non-strategic nuclear weapons stationed in Europe.”¹⁴⁷ In this regard, a Polish observer has claimed it is “imperative for NATO to retain an ‘in kind’ capability in Europe to deter Russia,” particularly in light of the greater role nuclear weapons play in the doctrine, plans, and potential operations of the Russian armed forces.¹⁴⁸ While nuclear weapons are seen in the region, as in

the rest of NATO, as fundamentally a deterrent, a CEE analyst has speculated that the Baltic states, because of their relative military weakness, location near Russia, and dependence on timely reinforcement from other allies, might believe nonstrategic nuclear arms “could provide NATO with additional instruments to counter any aggressive action on the part of Russia, providing a credible escalation option between conventional capabilities and strategic nuclear forces.”¹⁴⁹

Hedge Against Certain Future Threats

Though CEE countries value nonstrategic nuclear weapons primarily in terms of promoting alliance cohesion and checking Russian threats, they also recognize these arms are one type of insurance against what the Deterrence and Defense Posture Review report characterizes as “a variety of challenges and unpredictable contingencies in a highly complex and evolving international security environment.”¹⁵⁰ The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, notably the apparent effort of Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, could lead to some of those contingencies and the nonstrategic nuclear capabilities of the alliance could be critical in deterring WMD use against NATO allies.¹⁵¹ For now, however, dealing with the known danger from Russia is the higher priority and the threat of a nuclear Iran is an added reason to retain dual-capable aircraft and nuclear gravity bombs in Europe.¹⁵²

V. CEE Perspectives on Limiting Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons

The United States takes the position that the next round of nuclear arms negotiations with Russia should include pursuit of limits on nonstrategic nuclear weapons.¹⁵³ NATO endorses this position.¹⁵⁴ Russia so far has shown little interest in such limits, not least because of its significant edge in this category and its reliance on nuclear weapons to compensate for deficiencies in its conventional forces. When negotiations will take place is unclear. The United States and NATO have, however, identified three kinds of limits that might be applied to nonstrategic nuclear weapons. One involves measures to increase transparency regarding the numbers, locations, and types of weapons. Another would relocate weapons away from the NATO-Russia border. And a third would be reductions in weapon inventories. CEE allies support such limits in principle. Not surprisingly, given the political-military value they attach to nonstrategic nuclear weapons, their support is conditional. They obviously favor strict limitation, and preferably elimination, of Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons, but have concerns about the *quid pro quo*s NATO would incur in the bargain.

In general, the eastern members of NATO see advantages in limiting nuclear weapons, but are unsettled by proposals for substantial reductions in short time frames. They formally accept

President Obama's vision of a nuclear-free world, for example, but doubt its realization and fear it could encourage destabilizing cuts short of "nuclear zero."¹⁵⁵ As a result of their anxieties about ongoing Russian activities, nuclear and otherwise, they "perceive that this is not an appropriate time to change NATO's current nuclear arrangements";¹⁵⁶ their questions about the strength of allied commitments would tend to reinforce this perception. Instead, as a top Polish diplomat told the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, changes in nonstrategic nuclear arsenals should follow "a step-by-step approach, not limited by any deadlines and thus flexible and realistic," eventually culminating in the "reduction and elimination of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in conjunction with [the] general disarmament process."¹⁵⁷ And any arms control approach that is adopted should "ensure...undiminished security for all NATO's members," in the words of three former defense ministers from CEE countries.¹⁵⁸

Increasing Transparency

With regard to the specific limits, transparency is considered a prerequisite for relocation or reduction of nonstrategic nuclear weapons. Accurate information would be necessary both to fashion and verify an agreement intended to restrict the weapons, particularly Russian warheads and bombs. The inadequacy of available information on the Russian arms is a cause of concern for CEE allies; they are disturbed not only by what they know of Russian capabilities, but also by what remains unknown. In an informal paper forwarded to the NATO secretary general in April 2011, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and several other allies said "[t]he lack of transparency [for nonstrategic nuclear weapons] is a source of insecurity." They recommended information exchanges between NATO and Russia "for increasing transparency concerning numbers, types, locations, command arrangements, operational status, and level of storage security," as well "any plans to move tactical nuclear weapons" and "nuclear doctrines, with special emphasis on the role of tactical nuclear weapons."¹⁵⁹ The Central and Eastern Europeans are likely to insist on strict verification of any agreement, given that Moscow has failed to abide by its 1991-1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, which included the commitment to eliminate "battlefield nuclear weapons"—nuclear artillery, short-range ballistic missiles, and land mines.¹⁶⁰ (The United States undertook comparable initiatives at the same time, but, unlike Russia, carried them out in full.) It should be noted that, in addition to Russian recalcitrance, the reluctance of NATO countries that host U.S. nuclear weapons to advertise that fact could complicate adoption of transparency measures.

Relocating Weapons

Relocation of nonstrategic nuclear weapons could involve designation of a non-deployment zone and consolidation of weapons at fewer storage sites. With weapons of this sort currently based

in the northwestern corner of Russia and perhaps in Kaliningrad as well, the Baltic states and Poland understandably find special appeal in proposals for relocation. “An agreement creating a non deployment zone for tactical nuclear weapons on either side of the NATO-Russia border would be a small but important step towards the stated aim of NATO’s Strategic Concept—to create a world free of nuclear weapons,” says a former Latvian defense minister.¹⁶¹ A former senior Polish official similarly suggests that “based on the openness of information shared on the location of tactical nuclear weapons, it would be desirable to begin negotiations aimed at reallocating storage depots containing these armaments away from Central and Eastern Europe, including from Germany, and, as a compensation, from some European part of the Russian Federation.”¹⁶² CEE countries undoubtedly would prefer the movement of Russian weapons as far away as possible, meaning to sites beyond the Urals to the Asian portion of Russia, but this prospect antagonizes the Japanese, who remember an analogous controversy over proposed limits on Soviet SS-20 missiles,¹⁶³ and with whom these countries seek closer cooperation.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, a proposal to relocate weapons to Asian Russia almost certainly would be used by Moscow as an added reason for the United States to withdraw all of its weapons from Europe, which CEE allies oppose.

CEE countries could support consolidation of nonstrategic nuclear weapons at a smaller number of sites as long as the change did not set in train the withdrawal of U.S. weapons.¹⁶⁵ As a practical matter, withdrawal would be a risk of consolidation. At present, nuclear bombs for dual-capable aircraft are said to be stored at six air bases in five NATO countries.¹⁶⁶ As a consequence, consolidating weapons at fewer bases likely would mean fewer allies hosting nuclear weapons. The remaining countries then might feel inclined—or pressured—to relinquish this burden-sharing responsibility. The chain reaction could end with the total removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from NATO territory and the loss of the security benefits provided by their presence.

Reducing Weapons

Needless to say, relocation would not eliminate any of the Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons that threaten CEE alliance members. The weapons could be redeployed to places nearer these countries, especially the Baltic states and Poland, in relatively short order. Thus, the proposals to limit nonstrategic arms that receive support from officials and experts in CEE countries frequently combine information exchanges and relocation with reductions. The willingness of CEE members to accept weapon cuts comes with a number of provisos.

First, under the security conditions likely to obtain for the foreseeable future, any reduction in U.S. weapons must not involve their complete withdrawal from NATO territory. According to a Polish analyst who has surveyed opinion within the defense and foreign affairs communities in

the region, “While CEE states oppose the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe, they all see room for quantitative changes in the current nuclear posture. The reason for this is that, even with fewer nuclear weapons in Europe, NATO’s deterrence package would remain intact.”¹⁶⁷ Just how low these states would be willing to go is something their respective governments have not made known and probably have not determined.

Second, reductions in U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons must be joined with reciprocal cuts in Russian weapons.¹⁶⁸ The option of unilateral reductions by the United States and its NATO partners is rejected. Pointing out that “the Russians won’t give up weapons for nothing,” a Polish observer sees U.S. weapons as affording some leverage in any future negotiations. A Lithuanian warns that unilateral withdrawal “would cause ‘momentary perplexity’ in Moscow, but Russia would immediately ‘pocket’ the gesture without reciprocity.”¹⁶⁹ The CEE position is consistent with the DDPR conclusion that there should be “reciprocal Russian actions to allow for significant reductions in forward-based non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to NATO.” The definition of “reciprocal actions,” however, has been left for the “appropriate committees” of NATO to define.¹⁷⁰ Some within the alliance maintain these actions could include Russian reductions in nonstrategic nuclear arms in return for not only cuts in U.S. weapons, but also limitations on NATO conventional forces and missile defenses, capabilities in which the alliance has advantages. CEE allies, in contrast, oppose such trades and favor reductions in kind—nuclear for nuclear. They fear that restrictions on NATO conventional forces, without comparable limitations on those of Russia, could harm their security, because while “NATO maintains conventional superiority in Europe, [they] feel that within their region Russia has the conventional upper-hand, and it is this regional element that concerns them the most.” In their view, any negotiations on conventional forces should take place in a separate forum.¹⁷¹

And third, reductions must decrease the significant disparity between U.S. and Russian nonstrategic nuclear weapons, even if strict parity seems an unrealistic objective.¹⁷² The lopsided numerical edge Russia holds makes it unlikely Moscow would accept an unequal reduction in its inventory if only nonstrategic nuclear weapons were up for negotiation. It has been suggested that an agreement with a common ceiling on strategic and nonstrategic, deployed and nondeployed warheads and bombs would enable Moscow to cut its nonstrategic nuclear weapons if the United States diminished its numerical advantage in nondeployed strategic nuclear weapons, which can be loaded on the long-range bombers, ICBMs, and SLBMs capable of striking Russia.¹⁷³ Even this, however, might not provide sufficient inducement for major Russian reductions in nonstrategic nuclear weapons. Officials in Tallinn, for example, view a common ceiling on weapons “with skepticism, since Moscow might decide to keep some advantage in sub-strategic nuclear weapons—the category Estonia finds most threatening.”¹⁷⁴

VI. Means of Assuring CEE Allies

Countries in the eastern part of NATO have been rather definite about what types of cooperation, capabilities, and activities give confidence in the security commitments they have from the alliance in general and the United States in particular. The basic means already have been discussed—membership in NATO and the Article 5 pledge, the transatlantic link with the United States, the U.S. military presence in Europe as well as the armed forces of the other NATO allies, and the alliance nuclear posture with U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons and allied dual-capable aircraft at its core. Since the security shock from the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, CEE allies have called for a set of more specific steps to ensure their defense. They fall within three categories: forward deployments and military infrastructure to provide a NATO presence in Central and Eastern Europe; exercises to demonstrate the readiness of the alliance to defend CEE countries; and contingency plans for their defense.¹⁷⁵

These measures are often referred to as “visible assurances.” An alliance requirement for “training, exercises, contingency planning and information exchange [to] provide appropriate visible assurance and reinforcement for all Allies” was included in the 2010 Strategic Concept at the urging of CEE members.¹⁷⁶ The emphasis on “visible” is an indication of the centrality of allied perceptions to assurance. Allies ultimately decide what assures, based on their particular characteristics and perspectives. What is seen tends to be more assuring than what is only promised. As a long-time NATO official concluded after interviewing members of the national delegations at NATO, the “focus [of all CEE allies] is on reassurance through visibility and location rather than the broader aspects of deterrence.”¹⁷⁷ One analyst has speculated that “historical references seem to play a major role” in the desire of CEE states for a greater allied military presence on their territories. “One of the weaknesses of past alliances was that political agreements were not backed by military deployments. Poland experienced that at first hand in 1939. This experience also influences modern strategies.”¹⁷⁸ Another observer argues that forward deployments, exercises, and contingency plans were used to back the Article 5 commitment during the Cold War, and that the new members of NATO look for the same types of assurance, which so far they have found lacking.¹⁷⁹ In addition, as discussed earlier, eastern NATO would require allied reinforcements in the event of conflict, and these measures would improve the ability to deploy forces in a timely manner. Nonetheless, it appears that the purpose of the “visible assurances” is, as the name indicates, primarily to assure rather than deter, although assurance is partly a matter of taking actions consistent with CEE perceptions of what will deter Russia.

Forward Deployments and Military Infrastructure

NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission

One example of forward deployment as a “visible assurance” is the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission. From the time Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia joined NATO in 2004, other alliance members have been maintaining their airspace sovereignty—against repeated Russian intrusions—because all three Baltic states lack fighter aircraft. Fourteen NATO countries, including the United States, have participated in the mission. On a rotational basis, one of the participating countries carries out a four-month deployment with four fighter aircraft and a ground crew with up to 100 personnel. The aircraft operate from an air base in Lithuania; bases in the other two countries may also be used at some future point. At present, the air policing mission is the only NATO force presence in the Baltic states, the alliance members perhaps most anxious about developments in Russia. Initially, it might be noted, some NATO countries looked askance at the mission on the grounds that the threat from Russia was exaggerated and the deployment of allied fighters nearby might be seen as provocative by Moscow. This disapproval later diminished, partly because of the invasion of Georgia and the previously described Russian exercises of 2009.¹⁸⁰ The NATO secretary general has commended the mission as an example of “Smart Defense,” where the Baltic states contribute to the alliance in other ways, while allies that already have invested in fighter aircraft provide air protection in rotation.¹⁸¹ In 2012, the Lithuanian defense minister said, “Those countries who come here to participate (in the air patrols) will have an opportunity to exercise and get to know the region, and we will have security over our heads, a secure airspace.”¹⁸²

U.S. Aviation Detachment in Poland

A more recently established forward deployment is the U.S. Air Force Aviation Detachment in Poland. President Obama, with the Polish president and prime minister, announced the memorandum of understanding setting up the detachment during his visit to Warsaw in 2011.¹⁸³ The unit was activated in late 2012. Stationed at an air base in central Poland, it supports rotational deployments of U.S. F-16s and C-130s and combined training exercises with like aircraft of the Polish air force. Four, 14-day rotations are planned for each year, with four aircraft in each rotation. The first rotations took place in 2013. Ten U.S. airmen are at the base on a continuous basis, but the number U.S. personnel can increase to as many as 250 during the rotations.¹⁸⁴ The remarks of the Polish defense minister at the activation ceremony for the unit suggest that a small NATO contingent deployed in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly one composed of U.S. personnel and equipment, can have an assurance value much greater than its military significance alone. The minister emphasized the detachment was “the first permanent presence of American soldiers on Polish soil,” called its establishment “a very important and

symbolic moment” in U.S.-Polish relations, and said it was an example of “cooperation that is not just about rhetoric, but about very specific, concrete steps.”¹⁸⁵

NATO Response Force

The forward-deployable NATO Response Force (NRF) potentially could be an instrument for assuring CEE allies. The alliance in 2002 agreed to establish the NRF as a multinational, joint (land, air, sea) force for rapid combat and crisis response in Article 5 contingencies and out-of-area operations. CEE countries, according to a Polish analyst, see as one element of assurance “developing the NATO Response Force with Article 5 missions in mind.”¹⁸⁶ Officials of the exposed and relatively weak Baltic states say the NRF is of “particular importance,” because its “ability to provide a rapid military response to an emerging crisis [can] be highly valuable as a potential contribution to the preservation of territorial integrity and to the credibility of NATO commitments to the region” under Article 5.¹⁸⁷ But for political and fiscal reasons, the NRF has never reached full strength. Moreover, in the decade since its inception, only some elements of the force have been used, and that has been for humanitarian missions and other non-combat tasks.¹⁸⁸ As a result, the NRF in practice has been perceived as “paper forces” by many in the CEE region.¹⁸⁹ The capability of the force may improve in the future, however. Both the Strategic Concept and DDPR express a commitment to upgrade the NRF.¹⁹⁰ And in 2012, the United States announced that a U.S.-based brigade combat team would be used to support the force, with a battalion rotating to Germany to participate in exercises and training.¹⁹¹ This decision was “greeted favorably” in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁹²

EPAA Missile Defense Deployments

The European Phased Adaptive Approach defense system, the U.S. contribution to NATO missile defense, also offers a measure of assurance to the eastern allies, principally through the deployment of system components in the CEE region.¹⁹³ Though the system is designed to intercept short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, its assurance value is primarily a matter of presence, not protection. The EPAA defense is intended to counter the missile threat posed by Iran, not Russia. Indeed the DDPR says explicitly that “NATO missile defence is not oriented against Russia nor does it have the capability to undermine Russia’s strategic deterrent.”¹⁹⁴ But for CEE allies in general, Russia poses the greater danger. The planned deployments of EPAA SM-3 interceptors (with small contingents of U.S. personnel) in Romania in 2015 and Poland in 2018 are perceived largely in terms of reinforcing ties with the United States and other NATO countries, which serve as the counterweight to Russian military power. Just as cancellation of the Third Site missile defense deployments was a source of anger for the Poles, Czechs, and others, the planned EPAA deployments are a source of assurance. For Poland, the SM-3 site “will be the achievement of one of its strategic objectives: hosting on its territory a permanent U.S. military installation that provides a direct link between Polish security and the defence of

other NATO members.”¹⁹⁵ For Romania, the foreign ministry in Bucharest explains, hosting the EPAA interceptors “can only validate the substantial value of [the] partnership [with the United States] and the important role our country plays in the Alliance. At the same time, [it] shows our country’s steadfast commitment to the principles of NATO’s indivisibility of security and Allied solidarity.”¹⁹⁶ For the CEE region overall, the deployments likewise are viewed “mainly through the prism of securing a presence in the region and fostering closer ties with the United States as a means to check any possible aggressive Russian policy.”¹⁹⁷ In short, as a top Defense Department representative in Europe puts it, “what the Poles and the Czechs and the Romanians and others to the east...want most, I think, is the physical reassurance of American boots on the ground. They want to see an American military presence in their country in a high profile program like [the SM-3 deployments].”¹⁹⁸

NATO-Related Infrastructure

The facilities associated with “boots on the ground” also contribute to the assurance of CEE allies. NATO military infrastructure that is located in the region not only materially represents the security commitments between these countries and the rest of the alliance, but also can be of practical necessity with regard to the airfields and ports for receiving reinforcements from abroad and the facilities for supporting the deployment of those forces when they arrive. After enlargement of the alliance, NATO did not make significant investments in infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe because the threat of Russian attack was judged low, such investments would have been costly, and there was a belief that forbearance would reassure Moscow that the intentions of the allies were benign.¹⁹⁹ CEE allies, however, are not adequately assured by the extent of the current alliance presence in their countries, which includes the Joint Force Training Center in Poland, the Heavy Airlift Wing at an air base in Hungary, and a few Centers of Excellence for training and research in various areas (the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Estonia, for example).²⁰⁰ Indeed, they “so far have perceived such a presence as insufficient.”²⁰¹ Along with more force deployments, they want additional or upgraded infrastructure. At a 2009 conference on “NATO Challenges and Tasks Ahead,” for example, the Polish defense minister raised “the issue of the equal distribution of NATO installations among the allies” and argued,

There were two waves of enlargement in the last ten years. The current geographic range of the Alliance is different now than in the 1990s. These changes must be reflected in the development of NATO’s structures and military infrastructure. Hosting such elements on the territory of the newer members is crucial for the cohesion and effectiveness of the Alliance. It more deeply anchors those nations to NATO’s structure, as well as increases their ability to contribute to the Alliance’s operation and development.²⁰²

Since that time, however, the distribution of installations is essentially unchanged; the planned missile defense sites in Romania and Poland are a notable new development.

Exercises

Military exercises long have been part of strategies to deter adversaries, but they also have played an important role in assuring allies. Exercises demonstrate preparedness to use armed force in the defense of security partners and strength ties between friendly militaries. It is not surprising, then, that in addition to forward deployments and military infrastructure, CEE allies have identified exercises as a “visible assurance.” Based on views expressed by representatives of these countries, an exercise intended to provide assurance should have at least six characteristics. First, it should involve an Article 5 scenario in which territorial defense of areas in the CEE region is practiced. Second, some or all of the exercise should take place on the territory of one or more CEE member states. Third, it should show the capability of NATO forces and logistics to provide reinforcement for CEE countries. Fourth, it should include participation by military forces of the United States as well as those of other allies. Fifth, ideally it should have a live-fire component. And finally, the exercise should be part of a continuing series.

The Steadfast Jazz exercise the alliance has scheduled for November 2013 appears to meet these desiderata.²⁰³ The scenario has NATO forces countering an invasion (officials have denied the invader is Russia). Exercise activities will be conducted in Poland and Latvia. The purpose of the exercise is to “test and train” the NATO Response Force, which should help improve the effectiveness of that formation. In combination with Steadfast Jazz, the three Baltic states will hold a command post exercise (Baltic Host) to test their ability to receive allied forces. Six thousand personnel from a dozen and a half countries will participate, though two-thirds of the forces will come from CEE countries and the United States reportedly is sending only 200 soldiers. The exercise will include a live-fire component at a training area in Poland. (Latvia will host a command-and-control drill for the exercise at one of its military bases.) Another “high visibility” exercise is planned for 2015. Although the purpose of Steadfast Jazz is to test the NRF, the unstated goal, according to one report, “is to reassure those NATO members closest to Russia that Article 5 is still the bedrock of the alliance.”²⁰⁴

Contingency Plans

The contingency plans CEE members see as an earnest of the Article 5 commitment are, given the nature of military planning, not a “visible” assurance like forward deployments, infrastructure, and exercises, but a means of assurance nonetheless. Contingency plans for the defense of NATO members in the CEE region direct allied attention to the security needs of those countries. Plans also can influence the capability requirements set by the alliance. And “[t]he process of preparing contingency plans,” as a participant at a NATO-related workshop in Vilnius said, “may be more important for assurance...than the quality of the plans.” The

participant went on to explain, “The engagement of all the Allies in the process would in itself...provide a form of assurance to all the new Allies anxious about Russia.”²⁰⁵

Prior to the Russian invasion of Georgia, full contingency plans for the defense of the CEE countries reportedly had not been drawn up by NATO, although “some amount of planning [had] been done for all—except for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.”²⁰⁶ According to a former State Department official who was closely involved in the initial enlargement of NATO, the alliance as a whole “unilaterally refrained from such steps partly as a confidence-building step towards Russia.”²⁰⁷ Leaders in the CEE region believed “[i]t was a mistake not to commence with proper Article 5 defense planning for new members after NATO was enlarged.”²⁰⁸ After the Russian invasion, CEE countries, notably Poland and the Baltic states, pressed for the development of contingency plans. A 2012 analysis of assurance in the NATO context, published by the National Defense University, reported that “[a] new contingency plan for the defense of Poland now exists, which has recently been expanded to the Baltic states.”²⁰⁹ In light of the various forms that Russian aggression can take, these plans presumably do, or should, incorporate some degree of matching flexibility. In addition, the allies are likely to insist that the plans be kept “up-to-date, precise, and realistic.”²¹⁰

Official Statements

One last means of assurance, not included in the standard list presented by eastern NATO members, deserves mention. Official statements are a common way to reaffirm security commitments to allies. CEE allies recognize that words have some value in this regard, otherwise they would not, for example, have expended considerable effort to ensure that the Strategic Concept emphasizes the Article 5 commitment and calls for the “visible assurances” to back it up. U.S. officials have made many pledges to uphold the security commitments to these countries. To this day, Lithuanians remember remarks President George W. Bush made in Vilnius in 2002: “Our Alliance has made a solemn pledge of protection, and anyone who chooses Lithuania as an enemy has also made an enemy of the United States of America. In the face of aggression, the brave people of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia will never again stand alone.”²¹¹ A decade later, a joint statement by President Obama and the presidents of the three Baltic states said in a similar vein, “the United States has a profound and enduring interest in the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.”²¹² But the new NATO members insist that words be matched by deeds.²¹³ Here a Polish analyst sees again the influence of position and past:

For the region of Central Europe...history and geography have dictated the need to pay special attention on the issue of security and survivability. The nation-states which emerged from the collapse of the Soviet empire nurtured the feelings of victimization and

distrust for both its potent neighbor to the East, and the “West,” frequently accused of ignoring or betraying the interests of the region.

Despite their legacy of successful political, societal and economic transformation, and membership in NATO and the European Union, security cultures of the countries in the region are still characterized by the fear of abandonment and *a high degree of caution regarding political declarations not backed by action.*²¹⁴

For the CEE allies, then, assurance is a matter not simply of what is *said*, but what is *signed* (defense agreements), *stationed* (force deployments), *shown* (exercises), and *set up* (contingency plans).

VII. Possibilities for Assuring CEE Allies If NSNWs Are Reduced or Removed

Given the views of CEE NATO members regarding the political-military environment, nonstrategic nuclear weapons, and the means of assurance, could they be assured of their security if the U.S. nonstrategic nuclear weapons assigned to the alliance were limited, reduced, or withdrawn? (Any constraints on the nonstrategic nuclear arms of Russia obviously would be welcomed; the issue would be what the United States and NATO gave up.) From the perspective of the capitals in Central and Eastern Europe, present conditions are not auspicious for significant changes in the nuclear posture of NATO. Russian aims, arms, and tactics are causes of an underlying strategic anxiety in region. U.S. force reductions in Europe and the rebalance to Asia raise questions about the commitment of the United States to defense of its NATO allies. Declines in defense spending threaten the conventional capabilities of the alliance. Major changes in NATO nonstrategic nuclear capabilities, after two decades of reductions that have left behind a relatively small force of dual-capable aircraft and nuclear gravity bombs, could harm the transatlantic link, overall alliance cohesion, and the deterrent to Russian nuclear coercion and use. Delay in pursuit of nuclear reductions until such time as conditions are more favorable is one way of assuring CEE countries. Russian roadblocks to the start of negotiations help in this regard. There is some reason to doubt, however, whether the conditions noted here will change anytime soon.

If reductions were pursued, giving weight to the arm control positions of CEE allies would be an important means of assurance. These allies have expressed their appreciation for the promise by the United States to consult with its NATO partners on any negotiations with Moscow related to nonstrategic nuclear weapons. (Adherence to this pledge would help keep away “the smell of Yalta.”) Proposals for complete withdrawal of U.S. weapons, especially unilateral withdrawal, would unsettle CEE allies and arouse strong opposition. Measures to make nonstrategic nuclear arsenals more transparent would receive their support. Relocation of Russian weapons to distant locations would be favored, consolidation of U.S. weapons at fewer sites would be viewed

cautiously (because it might precipitate withdrawal), and relocation combined with reductions in Russian weapons would be preferred. Any reductions must be reciprocated by Russia, involve in-kind cuts (no reductions in Russian nuclear weapons for reductions in U.S. and NATO nonnuclear capabilities), and carried out in a deliberate step-by-step manner that would give allies time to adapt to the change.

To the extent the prospect of nuclear reductions left CEE allies uneasy, assurance measures of the kind described in the previous section presumably could come into play. Assurance would be provided through more and better forward deployments, infrastructure, exercises, and contingency plans. There are limits, however, to the assurance that can be supplied through these means. The fiscal austerity and force reductions of NATO allies, along with the shift of America's gaze toward Asia, makes significant "more and better" in "visible assurances" unlikely. If funds and forces were available, the NATO-Russia Founding Act contains, in addition to the "three no's," a self-imposed constraint on conventional force deployments in Central and Eastern Europe: "NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its defense and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement *rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.*"²¹⁵ This constraint could be reconsidered and abandoned, but the reaction by Russia would have to be taken into account. Moscow would be firmly against such a change, as it would be to other assurances. Russian objections per se would be less the concern than Russian countermoves that rattled CEE allies and thereby undermined efforts at assurance. Here a careful balance would need to be struck.

But the most important limit is the inability of "visible assurances" related to conventional defenses fully to substitute for nonstrategic nuclear capabilities in the eyes of CEE allies. Many argue that improvements in conventional forces and missile defenses make possible reduction in the role and number of nuclear weapons. This is, for example, a theme in the *Nuclear Posture Review Report* issued by the Defense Department in 2010.²¹⁶ CEE allies are dubious of the argument. A 2012 analysis based on interviews with officials and outside experts throughout the CEE region found that,

Although CEE states perceive the importance of NATO's robust conventional deterrence and "visible assurance," they do not acknowledge a direct link between strengthening NATO's conventional capabilities and reducing the number of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. Nuclear and conventional capabilities are considered in CEE states as totally different categories of armaments, required to provide a response to different kind of contingencies. Appropriate reinforcement capabilities and "visible assurances" are seen as indispensable, whether or not the U.S. nuclear weapons are based in Europe.²¹⁷

Allies in Central and Eastern Europe see nonstrategic nuclear weapons as having special roles in deterring the threat of nuclear intimidation and attack, and in lending greater solidarity to the

alliance through the forward presence of U.S weapons and the burden-sharing arrangements associated with those arms. The assurance value of the weapons derives from these roles. Nonnuclear measures would demonstrate the NATO and U.S. commitment to the security of Central and Eastern Europe if nonstrategic nuclear weapons were reduced, but they would be insufficient compensatory assurance if the U.S. weapons were eliminated entirely.

Endnotes

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³ Russian President Putin Delivers Annual State of Nation Address, April 25, 2005, Open Source Center FEA20050425002821.

⁴ Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to television channels Channel One, Rossia, and NTV, August 31, 2008, transcript available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82912type82916_206003.shtml. See also remarks by Medvedev at the meeting of the International Club Valdai in Moscow on September 12, 2008, transcript available at http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/09/12/1644_type82912type82917type84779_206409.shtml.

⁵ *The Russian Federation National Security Strategy Through 2020*, approved by Russian Federation Presidential Edict No. 537, May 12, 2009, Open Source Center CEP20090513557001; and *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, approved by Russian Federation presidential edict, February 5, 2010, Open Source Center FEA20100209001280. According to the Director of National Intelligence, “Russian military programs are driven largely by Moscow’s perception that the United States and NATO are Russia’s principal strategic challenges and greatest potential threat. Russia’s...still significant conventional capabilities, oriented toward Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far East, are intended to defend Russia’s influence in these regions and serve as a ‘safety belt’ from where Russian forces can stage a defense of Russian territory.” James R. Clapper, “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community,” statement for the record, in Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States*, 112th Cong, 1st sess., S. Hrg. 112-252 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2012), pp. 28-29, available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg71843/pdf/CHRG-112shrg71843.pdf>.

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Appendix: Map of Central and Eastern Europe

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.