

## NATO's Deterrence Policy – Time for Change?

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The Cold War is commonly known as the prime time of nuclear deterrence. It used to be a high-profile and lucrative subject for the political scientists. Nuclear deterrence symbolised the ultimate dream of a strategist: it was about a *tête-à-tête* battle between two military superpowers for the domination of the world, with the survival of humanity itself at stake. Emergence of the nuclear weapon has added a new dimension to international politics and exponentially increased the cost of any possible new war among the great powers. The limits of nuclear deterrence were tested only once, when N. Khrushchev and the Kennedy brothers engaged in the “Chicken” game over the Cuban missiles, bringing the world to the brink of extinction as close as it ever was. This led to the mutual realisation of nuclear parity and the MAD doctrine, which in turn enabled the high-time of arms control with the signing of NPT (1968), ABM (1972) and SALT I (1972) treaties. During the 1980s, the Pershing missile crisis and Reagan’s Star Wars triggered a short-lived relapse into a new arms race, which ended with the signing of START I (1991) and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

With the end of the Cold War, nuclear deterrence has entered the twilight zone of strategic uncertainty. Some scientists even say it is five minutes to midnight (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2007). Indeed, the strategic landscape has been changing dramatically over the past two decades. While the nuclear stockpiles of the two Cold War blocs – NATO and what was the Warsaw pact – have been reduced considerably, but at the same time new nuclear-armed states have emerged, proliferators have proliferated, and there is a number of nuclear wannabes lining up at the door of the elite nuclear club.

Meanwhile, the direction of NATO’s nuclear policy and posture gives a strange impression that it is a lazy afternoon, not midnight, in global politics. Over the past 15 years, NATO’s nuclear deterrent capability has

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been declining both in terms of the quantity of nuclear warheads, and in terms of the scope and variety of delivery weapons systems. Even the remaining warheads and weapons systems have not been upgraded or replaced. For example, in 1971, there were 11 different nuclear weapon systems deployed in Europe. By 1999, only one – DCA (dual-capable aircraft) bombs – was remaining (NATO's nuclear forces, 2008). The emphasis was not so much on keeping nuclear deterrence credible but proving to internal and external audiences that nuclear weapon has become all but irrelevant in the strategic thinking of the Western powers and NATO. By contrast, other parts of the world show completely different dynamics. Russia, which has rebounded impressively from the recession of the nineties, has several new nuclear weapon systems programmes in the pipeline and increasingly relies on the nuclear element of its defence posture, as it was explicitly declared in Russia's military doctrine of 2000. Pakistan and India made nuclear threats an integral part of their grand strategy, while some other countries are actively seeking access to nuclear technologies.

All of this points clearly at the need to reassess the role of nuclear deterrent within the overall defence posture of the Alliance. In this article, we will first examine the limitations of the current NATO's nuclear posture in the light of dynamic changes in the security environment. We will also consider the value of a tailored nuclear deterrence in the light of the classical theory of deterrence and the possibility for NATO to apply this approach on an ad hoc basis. Finally, we will discuss how the Baltic states fit in the picture of current NATO's nuclear posture, if at all.

This article does not pretend to be a definitive, exhaustive or authoritative source on nuclear deterrence, but it does attempt to shed some light on the key trends emerging in the nuclear realm of the current international politics, as seen from the perspective of a smallish, non-nuclear ally.

### **1. The limits of the current NATO's nuclear posture**

NATO's nuclear posture has been undergoing only quantitative rather than qualitative changes since the end of the Cold War. The Alliance's Strategic Concept of 1991 stipulated that "US nuclear forces in Europe remains vital to the security of Europe" and nuclear weapons "remain essential to preserve peace". At the same time, given the changes in the security

environment, the Allies also decided to „significantly reduce their sub-strategic nuclear forces“. These principles were reiterated in the Strategic Concept of 1999.

As of 2008, the core principles of NATO's nuclear deterrence remain unchanged. One very probable explanation of such steadfast continuity is that NATO's deterrence posture still works – no nation has ever dared to challenge it, at least directly. An alternative explanation can also be put forward: nuclear weapons lost their role in strategic thinking of NATO countries – their use or even threat to use them seems illogical given NATO's conventional superiority over any would-be aggressor. Politicians tend to avoid the nuclear issue altogether, as it is utterly unpopular to contemplate nuclear in the domestic politics of some Western nations, in particular the countries of the continental Europe. As a result, the debate on nuclear issues is mostly limited to the academic community.<sup>1</sup> Internal discussions within NATO on the matter are conducted in complete secrecy, which makes NATO's nuclear deterrent secret. One can speculate that the rogue regimes are no doubt aware of the US, UK or France's nuclear capabilities, but they hardly know that NATO as a whole has its own nuclear policy and nuclear forces (in the form of DCA). There is a danger that this policy of secrecy may prevent the Allies from sending a credible message to those who have to be deterred.

Paradoxically, the three NATO nuclear powers seem to be more transparent and public about their nuclear postures. For example, the UK had a robust public debate before making the decision to maintain its TRIDENT system (BBC News, 2006). French leadership also does not shy away from publicly reiterating its reliance on nuclear capabilities (International Herald Tribune, 2008). This openness, however, is mostly limited to the discussion on reduction of stockpiles or modernisation of existing nuclear capabilities of the individual Allies, but not on the use of the nuclear deterrent in the broader international context. These debates demonstrate high degree of reluctance in the nuclear nations to consider employment of nuclear arsenal as an effective foreign policy tool. Furthermore, this relative transparency at the state level is not transmitted to the overall NATO's strategy on how to employ nuclear power in support of its political objectives.

The rogue regimes are no doubt aware of the Western societies' contempt of everything nuclear and exploit this successfully to their advantage. Mr. Khan has pioneered a successful world-wide business scheme for clandestine trade in nuclear technologies. Iran's President Ahmadinejad staked the status and prestige of his country as well as his own political career on the nuclear programme. Most impressively, Kim Jong-Il has already reaped tangible benefits of "physically displaying" its nuclear deterrent (BBC News, 2003) – N. Korea was slated to receive 50000 tons of heavy fuel oil as a down payment for shutting down nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, and a further 950000 tons of oil, as well as a package of political rewards if Kim follows through with his promises to end all nuclear weapons-related activities.

A great cultural divide seems to be emerging between the West and the rest when it comes to strategic thinking on nuclear weapons. For non-Western *de facto* or latent nuclear countries, nuclear bomb is a symbol of glory and international recognition. For the West, the picture is blurred: on one hand, it is understood as a necessary and efficient political-military device of deterrence, the very last resort, which will hopefully never be used. On the other hand, its power of annihilation makes it an embarrassing, immoral and shameful weapon, especially in the context of self-perceived moral righteousness and civilizational superiority of Western liberal democracies.

This cultural divide in itself is one of the key underlying reasons for some of the current strands of global tension. To manage these tensions, first, a better understanding of the other side of the divide is necessary, and, second, the nuclear deterrence has to be analysed in the context of appropriate culture. There are quite a few unanswered questions in this regard. For example, why some nations seek to acquire nuclear weapons, while others – do not, or even try to get rid of them? Furthermore, what is the ultimate purpose of nuclear deterrence? What is more important or more urgent: deterrence of acquisition or deterrence of employment?

NATO's Strategic Concept of 1999 stipulates that "the nuclear weapons render the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable." NATO Allies seem to accept this assumption as a matter of fact. However, in the current environment, it is increasingly becoming a matter of theology: do the Allies still believe that their nuclear weapons render aggression against NATO unacceptable? The latent and *de facto*

adversaries have improved dramatically their calculation skills thereby lowering the acceptability threshold. Moreover, NATO itself seems to be increasingly intolerant towards its own nuclear capabilities.

NATO is at an important juncture: current trends in the strategic environment points at the need to reappraise the relevance of NATO's nuclear posture and rearticulate NATO's deterrence objectives. NATO claims that it maintains only the minimum number of nuclear weapons necessary to support its strategy of preserving peace and preventing war (NATO's nuclear forces, 2008). Furthermore, with the end of the Cold War, NATO terminated the practice of maintaining standing peacetime nuclear contingency plans and associated targets for its sub-strategic nuclear forces. As a result, NATO's nuclear forces no longer target any country.

Such "one size fits all" policy has obvious advantages, excluding the advantages of a tailored approach. Tailored approach relies upon development of more empirical and specialized approach to strategic confrontations, tempered by knowledge of an adversary's particular "beliefs, will, values, and likely cost-benefit calculations under specific conditions," and produce carefully designed declaratory policies and specific responses to an adversary's actions (Shaw, J.E. 2003). Such a tailored approach stands in sharp contrast to the NATO's current application of "one size fits all" approach.

How can mere existence of NATO's nuclear weapons convey specific message to the specific actor in the specific context? Colin Gray notices that deterrence for many decision makers is irresistibly attractive because it "encourages the idea that one concept fits all cases, especially when long-range nuclear forces come to be referred as the deterrent" (Gray 1998:53). Of course, "one size fits all" approach gives a great degree of flexibility but also allows candidate nuclear powers to ignore threats by believing or pretending that signals sent by NATO Allies are not directed against them. The fact that the intended deterree has to choose to be deterred is often overlooked.

During the Cold War, NATO maintained standing peacetime nuclear contingency plans. This approach encompassed a mixture of active, even coercive measures (such as during the Cuban crisis, or the Pershing missile

crisis) and passive approach, relying upon the existence of large nuclear arsenal itself. After the Cold War, the first element has been lost, leaving NATO's nuclear posture only with the fact of possession of nuclear weapons. This policy has one clear advantage – it allows the policy makers to forget and ignore the existence of their own nuclear weapons, at least until there is an “imminent threat”. However, current trends show that the possession of nuclear forces, even reinforced by a combination of declaratory policy and appropriate economical and political measures, is not sufficient to prevent *de facto* states from expanding their arsenals or wannabe nuclear states from acquiring nuclear weapons. The number of nuclear states has been increasing steadily notwithstanding the NPT (Nuclear non-proliferation treaty) regime. Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea proved and now Iran is proving the limits of non-proliferation efforts. Some of these countries (Iran or North Korea) seem to be ready to threaten individual members of the Alliance, despite NATO's nuclear deterrent.

Nuclear weapons possess huge deterrent potential but it can be fully realised only if policy is clearly articulated, conveyed and the opponent believes in credibility of the message. However, the Alliance seems to abstain (and with good reason) from ever threatening any country with military means. Political, economic and other forms of persuasion are less effective, when they are not accompanied by the big stick behind the back. Deterrence theorists contend that the more a country or an alliance is conceived as strong, united, warlike, threatening or even revengeful, the better for deterrence. In NATO, it has become a common sense to consider nuclear weapon as first and foremost a political (and increasingly secretive, or “forgotten”) device rather than a military capability. It is even considered bad manner to talk nuclear within the Alliance's defence planning community. Consequently, NATO is sending no signal at all.

In the end of the day, it is about the willingness of the Alliance to actually commit its formidable military power in specific situations. The fact of the existence of nuclear forces is not sufficient to prevent many conflicts or actions against NATO's interests. This is largely the result of perceptions about the willingness of the Alliance to convey its readiness to use conventional, and, as a last resort, nuclear force. Therefore, if a threat is perceived, let alone imminent, it will probably require more direct efforts

on the part of the Alliance to communicate its will and intention to act than has been the case in the past.

## 2. Tailoring deterrence to the threat

The very idea of deterrence is built upon an uncritical assumption of human rationality: opponents engaged in a strategic game are deemed to be able to calculate or at least estimate relative costs and benefits of their actions. The concept of deterrence assumes that states and non-state actors are human-like semi-rational players that calculate costs, risks and benefits, i.e. their behaviour can be modified. Deterrence theorists believe that costs/benefits analysis is essential in decision making process. Within this broad rationalist camp of thinking, many theories and concepts try to define the substance of rational behaviour.

For example, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein argue that, though leaders calculate in accordance with rational deterrence theory's predictions, they often end up acting against them. Seemingly, the expected domestic political consequences of the use of force are a relevant intervening variable (Sperandei, 2006:265). In his review on the inadequacies of rational deterrence theory, Robert Jervis highlighted the practical importance of the individual level of analysis. Different actors have different views about what constitutes rational behaviour. Because each person is rational, but his or her rationality is grounded in specific values and means-ends beliefs, the resulting behaviour will naturally be idiosyncratic (Sperandei, 2006:265). Different actors have diverging system of values, diverse historical experiences and religious prejudices. At least in the context of international politics, rationality should be treated as a culturally, historically, religiously bounded phenomenon.

Daniel Morgan contends that the entities, which are now commonly referred to as the rogue states or regimes are imagined as sociopaths indifferent to threats and systemic sanctions (Morgan, 2005:287). Rogue regimes may look like crime syndicates but they usually behave more like business corporations after their fashion. Hence they are open to persuasion if presented with sufficient inducements. In this context, the image of "mad" leaders implies nothing but the limits of the ability of "rational" Western statesmen to understand them. Some of the motives for acquiring nuclear weapons by rogue regimes may seem irrational to a

Western observer, but usually there is a strict causal logic within the regime's own kind of rationality. E.g. for totalitarian leaders the loss of several main cities may seem an acceptable damage, but the loss of their own lives, most probably, is not.

Several critical areas could be distinguished that deserve a particular attention in dealing with particular nations:

1. Bureaucratic organizations may have blinders imposed upon them by their own institutionalized cognitive framework — that is, their deeply-rooted conception of how the world works and, more specifically, what the next war would look like, may result in unmotivated biases in interpreting new information (Rhodes, 1999). During crises, growing pressure complicates rational decision making. Consider North Korea – what is the likelihood that, in the event of a major crisis, the message of the Western nuclear powers or NATO would go through bureaucratic channels and reach North Korean leaders un-amended? And even if it did go through, would the North Korean leaders read it and perceive it the way the authors of the message wanted them to?

2. Leaders may psychologically resist hearing enormously painful news and advice that they must abandon cherished policies. If a nuclear programme is a source of national pride, as it is in Pakistan, India or Iran, deterrence or compellence to disarm becomes extremely difficult.

3. Domestic political agenda may require political leaders to invoke military measures or demonstrate militant and aggressive behaviour. As Russian-Japanese war in 1905 demonstrated, political leaders may feel that inaction may be even a more painful alternative than a lost war, especially if the future of the ruling regime is at stake.

4. Potential aggressors tend to focus on their own internal needs and tend to ignore external signals such as behaviour of the deterrent. Aggression is less a function of opportunity than it is of need (Lebow, 1981:274-277). Religious and historical memories can play essential role in this regard. Psychological pressures to ignore warning signs will be particularly strong during periods of internal or external crisis. Such leaders are more difficult to deter. In 1982, Argentine's leaders clearly demonstrated the limits of nuclear deterrence, when they decided to invade the Falkland Islands in

spite of the UK's nuclear deterrent. Moreover, in certain sense they did not miscalculate – the UK responded with a conventional force only.

In short, understanding is the first step to deterring successfully. An adequate deterrence strategy requires understanding the motives, goals and cultural peculiarities of different countries and organisations. NATO's adversaries are uncertain, their rationality is culturally bounded and often religiously twisted, intentions unclear, actual capabilities unknown and behaviour difficult to predict. Their internal logic and mechanisms must be fully understood to enable appropriate deterrence strategy. In the end of the day, policy of deterrence *vis-à-vis* concrete state or regime will always be tailored, at least to some extent. However, to achieve a more tailored approach to deterrence and compellence would require NATO Allies to overcome their own political, cultural, religious and military prejudices.

### 3. Practicing deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Against the background of the above theoretical considerations and historical examples, it is possible to inquire into some concrete contemporary cases. NATO faces three distinct challenges that require different responses: first, recognised and *de facto* nuclear states that may have hostile intentions towards NATO or individual Allies; second, non-state actors, in particular, terrorist organisations, that may have or seek to acquire nuclear devices (e.g. “dirty bombs”); third, nuclear proliferation itself is a serious danger – the globalisation era enables dispersion of technology, resources and “know-how” to both state and non-state actors. Tailoring deterrence to concrete states is relatively easy, compared to deterrence of non-state actors, in particular terrorist organisations. Deterring certain activities, such as nuclear proliferation, is even more daunting, if not impossible, task.

#### 3.1 Deterring states

India and Pakistan is a classical, even conventional example of nuclear deterrence. To a large extent, nuclear arsenals of India and Pakistan are first and foremost a threat to each other. In this respect, current NATO's nuclear deterrence posture seems sufficient. However, a worst case scenario - a collapse of Musharaff's regime and a takeover by radical fundamentalists in Pakistan – could change the strategic equation

dramatically. Given that NATO is heavily engaged in an operation in Afghanistan, including the fight against insurgency that is supported by the Pakistani Islamists, a direct stand-off with a radicalised, nuclear-armed Pakistan would become a grim possibility.

North Korea tried very hard to prove it has a nuclear weapon amid the reluctance of the other nuclear powers to believe. Regime survival is the key in understanding North Korean motives for investing so hard in their nuclear programme. Deterrence message *vis-à-vis* North Korean leaders would have to be completely different from, for example, Pakistan or Iran. In North Korea, playing with religious sentiments or using economic sanctions cannot work. Specific targeting of decision makers (so called leadership targets) threatening ruling regime in combination with economic rewards could lead to promising results, and to some extent did so already.

In recent years, Iran has turned into a chrestomatic case of a wannabe nuclear power. Iran's nuclear strategy can be portrayed as an "ambiguity strategy" – everybody believes Iran has a nuclear weapon programme, while Iranian leadership argues they would have it, if they decided to have it. Iran's policy is remarkable for its contradictory mixture of secular rhetoric of being a nuclear power, and religious, Islamic rhetoric of self-restraint.

Islam jurists agree that Islam explicitly prohibits indiscriminate killing. As the use of WMD implies such killing on a large scale, their acquisition and use are banned by some Muslim jurists, including radical Islamists. Iran's spiritual leader Ali Hoseini-Khamenei has issued fatwas that the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons (Mehr News Agency). This does not, however, preclude Iran's pragmatic leaders to pursue nuclear programmes. Though fully aware that their use is contrary to the spirit of Islam, these leaders insist that they need them for deterrence purposes. This contradiction between teaching of Islam and realpolitik could well be exploited by Western powers. Strong public diplomacy targeting ruling regime in combination with other conflict management mechanisms could be more effective in preventing use of military forces in this region. Targeting militarily ruling elite or applying economic sanctions would probably prove to be counterproductive.

Israel presents another nuclear challenge in the Middle East. Nuclear Israel could serve as a perfect excuse for most of the countries in the region to develop their own nuclear weapons. Paradoxically, everybody knows Israel has a nuclear weapon, except the Israelis who say they do not know if they have it or not. Furthermore, Israel's actions in Palestine or Lebanon provide justification to the neighbouring countries to develop all necessary means to counter Israeli power. War in Iraq has further encouraged ideas about the conspiracy of the West against Islam and consolidated public opinion in the region that nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction may be necessary to counter the forces of evil.

Transparency of Israeli nuclear capabilities may well be the key in pursuing policy of non-proliferation in this region. Israel's public recognition of its capabilities would probably cause widespread protests in most countries of the region. But this would be only a short term effect. In the longer term de-demonization of Israel would deprive ruling elites of the neighbouring of an important reason to seek nuclear capabilities. In addition, robust public support of the Alliance's members to Israel could "deter" Israeli leaders from using nuclear weapons in case of military conflict with its neighbours.

As discussed above, state actors present very diverse challenges to NATO. Alliance has different objectives *vis-à-vis* these countries, therefore, means to implement those objectives would also have to be different. The Alliance should be flexible enough and able to adopt a wide range of policies on a case-by-case basis. Soft measures could include public diplomacy efforts; work with specific decision makers or interest groups that are behind nuclear weapons programmes; freezing of bank accounts and other economic sanctions. Only if and when these efforts fail, hard measures should follow, in the form of a threat of decapitation strikes or similar pre-emptive (but not necessarily nuclear) actions.

### **3.2 Detering non-state actors**

Tailored approach in some cases can also be applied to deterring (or help acknowledge the limits of deterring) non-state actors. Of course, hardly anything can deter a committed terrorist, a jihadist, who is convinced that his act of terror is commanded by God Himself while he is a God's soldier. Moreover, from a perspective of cost-benefit relation, nothing seems to be

more attractive than the prospect of the top level of the Paradise (reserved exclusively to prophets and martyrs). In such a system of values, the possibility of being the subject of nuclear evaporation seems to be a particularly attractive option.

Though jihadists might be deemed irrational, they operate in the system of values particular to them. Inability to permeate alien value systems has often led to actions based on misjudgements thus greatly contributing to the failure of such a strategy. Unless it would be possible to offer more attractive alternatives to Paradise, annihilation remains the only available strategy to fight jihadism.

Deterrence, however, might work in cases of not-so-committed terrorists or those weighing the stakes. Cost/benefit analysis is completely applicable to their way of behaviour. Suicide bombers seem irrational at first glance but they have clearly articulated objectives that are understandable from their perspective and normative system. All terrorist actions are understood as appropriate measure to achieve tasks that were clearly formulated at the strategic level.

In this case, however, deterrence using military threats should be coupled with other means, such as “religious education” and public relations. In this sense, even terrorists can be deterred by “persuading” them (triggering fear) that their attacks would be contrary to God’s will and do not guarantee a place in the Paradise – quite the opposite. For example, Indonesia has recently undertaken a risky but to some extent successful programme of re-education, wherein persuasive powers of reformed jihadists are being used to “re-educate” terrorists (Economist, 2007).

### **3.3 Allowing proliferation?**

Nuclear proliferation is the most difficult challenge in terms of deterrence. One, quite simply, cannot fight nuclear proliferation with nuclear means. But, in dealing with the consequences of proliferation, NATO’s nuclear potential is probably under-used and even neglected. NATO could consider developing some creative approaches in what specific circumstances NATO may use “nuclear messages” to achieve desired effects.

On this tricky issue, “thinking out of the box” is necessary. One could ask, for example, what is worse – Iran’s and North Korea’s continued ambiguity or knowing for sure that they do have a nuclear weapon? Should NATO or the West in general prevent them from acquiring Nuclear Weapons by any means (including an all-out war as last resort) or learn to live with a nuclear Iran and North Korea? In the latter case, the West would have to consider allowing graduated proliferation into several other countries as well. This is not a new idea – already Kenneth Waltz (1981) argued that the spread of nuclear weapons would bring stability regardless of the characteristics of the regime and its leader. Waltz believed that possession of nuclear weapons would moderate behaviour and bring nuclear stability.

Another interesting venue of research that could shed some light on ways to deal with proliferation would be studying why a lot of countries that do possess necessary capacity to produce a nuclear weapon do not even consider such a possibility (e.g. Canada, Japan and larger European nations), and some nations have terminated their nuclear programmes (e.g. South Africa even disassembled its nuclear weapons)?

#### **4. And what about the Baltics?**

Should the Baltic states care about nuclear matters? How do they fit within NATO’s nuclear posture? On one hand, as NATO members, they are covered by the NATO’s nuclear umbrella (a fact that the Baltic politicians does not seem to remember too often) and they take part in NATO’s political consultations pertaining to the nuclear posture and policy. Moreover, the Baltic states may have more at stake in the credibility of NATO’s nuclear deterrence than most of the other NATO Allies. On the other hand, the Baltic states are probably least capable to contribute to NATO’s nuclear mission due to some objective and subjective reasons.

Firstly, there are two important caveats that limit the Baltic states’ participation in NATO’s nuclear policy. The Baltic states are covered by the “Three No’s” policy – a commitment NATO made to Russia back in 1997 to not base nuclear weapons on the territories of the former Warsaw Pact and the former German Democratic Republic. One cannot completely exclude the possibility that changes in the strategic environment could at some point trigger a review of NATO’s unilateral “Three No’s”

commitment. Another important limitation is the fact the Baltic states do not have legitimate air force (apart from personnel, some ground infrastructure, transport aircraft and some helicopters). Fighter aircraft is the main element of the DCA concept, which is a key element of NATO's nuclear posture and policy.

Secondly, there is a simple lack of nuclear expertise and even basic knowledge – there have not been any major academic publications on the subject in Lithuania (and most probably in Latvia and Estonia as well) on the subject of nuclear policy or nuclear deterrence. Even disregarding the fact of NATO membership, some factors suggest the need for more attention of the Baltic security analysts to the matter. The most obvious one is Kaliningrad, where the Russian Federation had allegedly deployed tactical nuclear weapons (Washington Times, 2001). Of course, this does not warrant rethinking of the “Three No's” posture, at least today, but thinking strategy and thinking nuclear has to be done to some extent in the Baltic states.

Thirdly, security guarantees from third nations always suffer from credibility problem. History provides many examples when extended deterrence fails (e.g. British and French security guarantees did not deter Germany from attacking Poland in 1939). Extended *nuclear* deterrence is even more difficult to implement. For the United States, the United Kingdom or France to prove to other nations that they are ready to risk nuclear holocaust for the sake of the Baltic states is extremely difficult. For example, in Stratfor's view, it is doubtful that Russia would believe the United States' willingness to risk a nuclear confrontation over the Baltics (Stratfor, 2001).

In the end of the day, nuclear deterrence alone cannot guarantee any Allies' security from any threat – it is, however, a crucial part of the overall Alliance's defence posture. At the very least, Baltic defence planners should be interested in upholding the credibility of NATO's nuclear umbrella, but also be aware of the inescapable limits of nuclear deterrence.

## Conclusions

NATO's nuclear deterrence suffers from a strong path dependency: nuclear policies, due to the political and military uniqueness of an atomic

bomb, are particularly resistant to change. The ultimate basis of nuclear deterrence is the possibility that employment would be a viable ultimate ratio. Despite the rationality inherent in deterrence theory and practice, it is impossible to know for sure how efficient it is, but the failure of deterrence would always be very clear and very costly. From this perspective, NATO's nuclear deterrence posture is a great success story because no country ever dared to enter into military confrontation with the Alliance. On the other hand, this success cannot be attributed solely to NATO's nuclear potential.

After the Cold War, NATO's objectives and, most importantly, means to support its policy, have changed. Military power is more closely linked to non-military instruments available to the Alliance and nuclear capabilities lost their importance in the eyes of decision makers. No political will exists to use nuclear potential for compellence purposes. Some would argue that non-nuclear NATO would be much better suited for countering new and emerging threats than a nuclear Alliance. In the case of non-state actors, there is also little room for nuclear deterrence, other than nuking terrorists out of their mountain caves. Of course, state-sponsors of terrorist organisation are susceptible to nuclear deterrence, although to a varying degree.

In the context of an ever dynamic security environment, NATO needs to revitalise nuclear debate and make it more transparent. Its current posture is becoming outdated and inadequate. Alliance's deterrence also suffers from a credibility problem – how far nuclear Allies would be prepared to go in defence, or indeed, in response on behalf of non-nuclear Allies? However, one has to keep in mind that, due to sensitivities of this topic in some members of the Alliance, this debate could also provoke counterproductive politicisation of the subject, thus undermining NATO's nuclear deterrent. No doubt, with or without a NATO-wide nuclear debate, the three NATO nuclear countries will retain their nuclear arsenals. The question remains how to prevent NATO's collective posture from degrading further?

To some extent, the process of searching for new approaches to nuclear deterrence is already under way. For example, in response to emerging threats to the U.S. national security, the Bush Administration has argued that the United States must alter its deterrence strategy “from ‘one size fits all’ deterrence to tailored deterrence for rogue powers, terrorist networks,

and near-peer competitors” (Congressional Research Service). In a similar vein, the French president Nikolas Sarkozy hailed his country’s nuclear arsenal “as vital to deter a range of new threats, including Iran” (International Herald Tribune, 2008).

For NATO as a whole to remain relevant in the nuclear world, the Alliance needs to apply a more tailored approach to deterrence and compellence. This, in turn, would require NATO Allies to overcome their own political, cultural, religious and military prejudices. Tailored approach implies search for creative measures to deal with unconventional challenges, such as state-sponsored nuclear terrorism or nuclear proliferation to (and often among) rogue regimes. To be efficient, Alliance has to pool all the various strands of nuclear deterrence – diplomatic, political, military, economy – into a coherent strategy. The eventual drafting of a new NATO’s strategic concept will provide a good opportunity for this.

While new threats of asymmetrical nature are proliferating, NATO has to deal with the problem of strategic imagination: what unlikely circumstances, what “unknown unknowns” would warrant nuclear weapon employment. The fear of even imagining such circumstances may lead the Euro-Atlantic community to a dramatic failure to prevent them from occurring.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent publications include Freedman, Lawrence, 2004. *Deterrence*, Cambridge: Polity Press and Morgan, Patrick M. 2003. *Deterrence Now*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.