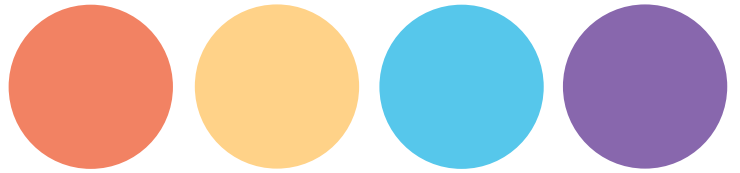




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## NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture Review

### A Status Report

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#### Summary

NATO is undergoing a Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR) that has been characterised by divisions and disagreements among members from the outset.<sup>1</sup>

Some, especially in the International Staff and in the US government, see it as an opportunity to reassess comprehensively the required mix of conventional, nuclear and missile defence capabilities required by the Alliance. Others, such as the German and Norwegian governments, see it as an opportunity to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy, to support both the nuclear non-proliferation regime and President Obama's Prague agenda. France, along with some of the newer member states on the other hand, sees little need for the review and believes change in NATO's approach is not only unnecessary but potentially dangerous to alliance cohesion.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is partly based on conversations with national and international staff at NATO HQ in November and December 2011, and January 2012.

The NATO committees responsible for the substantive inputs to the DDPR on their respective areas of competence have completed their work. Informal reports suggest they reflect the status quo. However consideration of these inputs, the options they contain, and the process for drafting the final document, including the respective roles of the NAC and the Secretary General in that process remains unclear. There is even a lack of clarity on how the DDPR will ultimately relate to NATO's already existing planning processes and documents.

Nevertheless, the Review provides a timely opportunity to confront the key issues facing NATO, namely: the significance of defence cuts; the differences over nuclear policy and disarmament; the consequences of missile defence; and the urgent need to develop a constructive relationship with Russia. Crucial questions include:

- What is the impact of the reductions in defence spending for existing commitments and contributions? Should NATO revisit its level of ambition?
- Is this the right moment to change the nuclear policy and posture and if so, how? Is the status quo sustainable?
- What is the appropriate role for NATO in arms control and disarmament?
- What are the consequences of the NATO missile defence project for defence priorities, for Alliance solidarity and cohesion and for relations with Russia?
- Can the Review help overcome the current impasse in relations with Russia where differences over missile defence overshadow all aspects of the relationship?

Answers to these questions are fundamental to NATO's future effectiveness.

Despite its potential significance, the review is proceeding with little real political engagement from national capitals and with almost no reference to the wider conditions of economic crisis and reduced defence resources. There is a significant danger that it will fail to address the new economic and political realities faced by the Alliance as a result.

This paper outlines the review process and current state of play, the national positions being taken up in the debate, and the issues at stake. It argues that without the injection of political interest and leadership there is a risk the opportunity for a comprehensive re-think of required NATO capabilities in new circumstances is being missed along with a vital opportunity to identify new avenues for productive dialogue with Russia. Prospects for the Chicago Summit in May are consequently uncertain at best. NATO cohesion and effectiveness, along with the overall security climate in Europe, may suffer as a result.

## I. The Lisbon Decisions

During the NATO Summit in Lisbon Alliance leaders adopted a new Strategic Concept developed during the previous 18 months. The new Concept was praised for its simplicity and brevity. However what was seen as an obvious benefit in terms of gaining consensus and of public presentation was also a disadvantage as it lacked much of the detail contained in previous Concepts. This was due not only to the desire for brevity but also to the existence of serious differences on key aspects of Alliance policies, particularly on the language describing the purpose of NATO's nuclear forces (declaratory policy), the nuclear posture itself, the role of missile defence and the importance attached to disarmament.

These differences were eventually resolved by a series of compromises. One of these concerned the request by certain countries for a specific review of NATO's nuclear posture. The period preceding the adoption of the Concept had seen interest focusing again on the longstanding question of the need to deploy US nuclear warheads in Europe. Expectations had been created, particularly among those in the NGO community who follow the issue, that this was an opportunity to review the existing nuclear arrangements. These expectations had received a set back at the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Tallinn in April 2010, where US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had set out 5 principles on NATO nuclear policy interpreted as strongly supportive of the status quo.

Nevertheless several countries continued to believe that some form of change in NATO nuclear policy was necessary and pressed for a review of the existing nuclear posture. Since they were not supported by all other members of the Alliance agreement was eventually reached by broadening the proposal to a review of the overall NATO deterrence and defence posture, including but not limited to its nuclear components.

The relevant language on what has become known as the deterrence and defence posture review (DDPR) is contained in the Declaration that accompanied the Concept at Lisbon. Alliance leaders tasked the NATO Council to undertake a comprehensive review of "NATO's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats to the Alliance" taking account of the evolving international security environment. This would include reviewing the range of strategic capabilities required by NATO, including its nuclear posture, missile defence, and other means of deterrence and defence.

Despite this outcome, the language selected in order to achieve consensus reflected uncertainty in some countries concerning the very wisdom of the exercise. The NAC was asked, for example, "to continue to review" the elements of NATO posture, a formulation which led some to question whether any new process was either implied or required.

## II. The DDPR Process

Nonetheless, a specific Deterrence and Defence Posture review (DDPR) is now up and running. It is overseen by member state Ambassadors (the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in permanent session). A first phase of reflection took place during the summer of 2011 based on four unpublished scoping papers prepared by the International Staff and four seminars each with contributions from two or three outside experts. The papers and the sessions were restricted to the NAC.

This phase, according to officials, focussed largely on the emerging threat environment and was essentially descriptive rather prescriptive. As one official noted it was “rather better at defining the problems than doing something about them”. In this sense the first phase was not assessed by officials as being very productive.

It is worth noting also that the involvement in Libya represented a considerable distraction during this period too, as it required frequent meetings of the NAC.

The second and more substantial phase commenced in September 2011. Inputs in this phase have been provided on conventional forces, missile defence, nuclear policy, and NATO's involvement in, and approach to, Weapons of Mass Destruction Control and Disarmament. These inputs came from the three principal NATO Committees with the relevant responsibilities and competences, namely the Defence Policy and Planning Committee (DPPC) for conventional forces and Missile Defence; the High Level Group for nuclear affairs; and the Division of Political Affairs and Security for the newly created Weapons of Mass Destruction Control and Disarmament Committee (WCDC).

Each of Committees involved received guidance from the NAC in the form of “taskings” which laid out the questions or lines of enquiry the NAC wanted addressed. The emphasis was on the provision of options rather than definitive conclusions or recommendations. Difficulties emerged in agreeing the taskings so that the formulation did not prejudice the outcome, a good indication of the internal Alliance politics involved here and of the difficulties that lie ahead. Final agreement on the “taskings” was only achieved through the intervention of the group of Four, or Quad, which comprises the U.S, the U.K, France and Germany, whose prior agreement normally underpins most sensitive NATO decisions.

Complete compartmentalisation of the key issues in the Review is of course impossible and there is inevitably a degree of overlap in terms of competences. The role and the competences of the WCDC Committee were ill defined, for example, and its work could relate to all dimensions of the Review.

Several issues are also directly related to relations with Russia. Cooperation with Russia in missile defence is well known to have been given a high priority but this is handled in the NATO-Russia Council which is obviously

not involved in the DDP, given that the latter is an internal NATO exercise. Nonetheless, as is discussed later in this paper, in identifying the linkage between the different components of NATO's overall posture and in hopefully assessing what these components might look like in combination to those outside of, and neighbouring the Alliance, the DDP can help or hinder the development of a more constructive relationship with Russia. It therefore cannot be considered entirely separately from NATO-Russia relations or from the dialogue being attempted in the NATO-Russia Council.

Progress on the work of the respective groups working on the Review has been reviewed at intervals. They completed their work and their reports in late January 2012. The next phase, the drafting of the DDP and the respective roles of the NAC and the Secretary General remain unclear. There will be a joint meeting of Foreign and Defence Ministers in April 2012 and the final product is foreseen for the next Summit in Chicago, May 20-21 2012.

### III. The DDP and NATO Defence Planning

It is worth noting the DDP is taking place alongside and, depending on its final status, will be superimposed upon, a plethora of already existing NATO planning processes and documents. These cover different fields and operate over different cycles but taken together they constitute the basis for the development, agreement and implementation of NATO agreed policy and plans.

Clearly the on-going work in these various planning and policy areas will be fed into the DDP. However, to what degree the results of the DDP will in turn impact on the existing planning process remains unclear as does the status the final DDP document itself will enjoy within overall NATO planning arrangements.

### IV. National Perspectives on the DDP

Implementation of the DDP was slow in getting underway and not without problems, reflecting different national attitudes on the aims and potential outcomes of the exercise and differing degrees of enthusiasm on its implementation.

For some members, such as the U.S and U.K, and some officials on the NATO International Staff, the DDP is a logical development because it represents the opportunity to provide the detail lacking in the new Strategic Concept concerning NATO's strategic requirements – the now familiar "appropriate mix of capabilities" – and to establish the relationships between the principal components including, and particularly for some countries, the newly adopted Missile Defence project.

In this view, as a comprehensive review the DDP should ensure that the principal components of NATO strategy are bound together in a coherent package which reflects the political goals of the Strategic Concept and the resources at the Alliance's disposal, including the crucial financial

dimension. The severity of the current economic crisis and its impact on defence spending in all member countries reinforces, for those of this persuasion, the potential significance and timeliness of the Review.

For some other countries, such as Norway and Germany, the Review is also an opportunity for NATO to change its nuclear policy and posture by reassessing existing arrangements, reducing reliance on the nuclear component, and giving greater acknowledgement of the contribution that arms control, disarmament and non proliferation (ADN) measures can make to Alliance security by reducing wider nuclear dangers and threats to the Alliance and its interests. Such adjustments in the view of this group, would send a clear message of support for the NPT regime and the Prague agenda of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

For a third group of countries still, including France and some of the newer members of NATO, the necessity for a Review remains questionable as it is not believed that changes to NATO's strategy are needed, or desirable in current conditions of strategic uncertainty. This group also argues that a review will simply duplicate the plethora of existing planning processes that underpin NATO policy making and implementation and in addition will impose unnecessary and artificial time constraints on decision-making.

In some cases, the scepticism is a matter of emphasis and nuance but simply put, the countries in this group believe that as a defence organisation NATO's emphasis should be on deterrence and defence. They remain unpersuaded of the potential role of disarmament. All agree with non proliferation measures but argue that these are national responsibilities and not for NATO as an organisation.

Those who seek change and those who are opposed to it therefore posit diametrically opposed views. Discussions therefore risk being especially divisive. Some countries, such as the UK and Poland<sup>2</sup>, have strong incentives to find common ground between these divergent positions in order to safeguard Alliance unity.

In the discussion on the DDPR the positions and attitudes of the U.S as the major stakeholder and provider carry, as always, particular significance. It can be assumed that the U.S will welcome the opportunity to generate a more effective contribution through a better use of resources. It can also be assumed that implementation of missile defence across NATO territory will remain a priority and the DDPR could be helpful in this respect. Finally, it can be assumed that in the discussions on nuclear policy and disarmament the US will seek to balance its support for the Prague agenda with the need to maintain Alliance unity.

Whatever their misgivings concerning the wisdom of the decision most members acknowledge the need to carry through the Review, albeit for some

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Poland's position in this debate, see Andrew Somerville, Ian Kearns, and Malcolm Chalmers, *Poland, NATO and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe*, RUSI/ELN Occasional paper, February 2012.

this will be an exercise in damage limitation or at least as one senior official commented, “do no harm”.

## V. The Issues at the Heart of the DDPR

### Conventional Forces

The provision of conventional forces to deter and if necessary defeat an adversary has always been a central element in NATO planning. The defence planning process is well established and has been adapted to meet the new strategic environment. The process has its own established cycle and rhythm and it can be assumed that inputs to the DDPR will reflect ongoing work.

In this respect the challenges facing NATO's conventional forces are self evident and include the need to balance the requirements for expeditionary forces with those for the traditional defence of territory and the need to take whatever steps are necessary to reassure more recently joined members of the credibility of the Article 5 commitment. The greatest challenge is the decline everywhere of defence budgets and the degree to which this could put at risk existing force and capability commitments

The basic planning assumptions for conventional forces remain the same, as will the generic requirements such as the need for expeditionary forces and in turn the requirement for forces to be deployable, flexible, and sustainable. The recent operation in Libya may lead to adjustments of emphasis in some areas of activity, for example air surveillance assets and the sustainability of certain munitions. However, the big question is whether the decline in the defence resources is sufficiently critical to put at risk the existing contributions and commitments of member states.

This situation has led to new demands for what is termed “smart” defence or finding new ways of spending defence resources in the most efficient and cost effective way. This is hardly a new situation. NATO has always suffered a mismatch between the capabilities required, the funds available, and the less than optimal way in which funds are used at national level to produce collective NATO results. Although the problem is particularly severe today, the remedies have a familiar ring, even if dressed in new clothes.

For the most part these remedies are based on the long recognised, but all too frequently ignored assertion that things should be done collectively and include concepts such as standardisation, interoperability, pooling, regional cooperation, joint procurement and other measures. There will be a renewed emphasis for greater cooperation at the bi-lateral European, EU, and transatlantic level.

Previous attempts at this kind of cooperation have traditionally foundered on the determination of countries to safeguard certain capabilities or put national interests first, particularly for example, in procurement policy where industrial and commercial interests frequently take precedence. Whether the existing economic situation is sufficiently severe to persuade countries to

abandon old habits and give collective solutions priority over national approaches remains to be seen.

It is too early to predict what approach the DDRP will take to the economic situation and whether it will recommend revising existing commitments and in what way. The need to revise existing commitments could and probably should mean revisiting the level of ambition as agreed in the Political Guidance that underpins NATO defence planning with regard to having assets which would permit the simultaneous conduct of two major and six minor operations.

### **Nuclear Forces**

As noted earlier, in the DDRP, responsibility for input on nuclear policy and posture has been given to the High Level Group (HLG); a body created in the 1970's to ensure that potentially sensitive nuclear policy issues received high level political attention. It comprises senior officials from national capitals and is chaired by the US.

For a variety of reasons, including the circumstances in which the DDRP was created, the work of the HLG is likely to be the centre piece of the Review – though whether the output will justify these expectations is another question.

Officials have noted that the taskings agreed by the NAC require that the HLG present options for possible changes to the existing arrangements for extended deterrence and the current requirement for US warheads in Europe. According to officials these options include maintaining the status quo, changes to the weapons, and or changes to the Dual Capable Aircraft, the platforms, that would be used to deliver the weapons to target.

Having weighed the advantages and disadvantages of eight options the HLG's report, according to NATO officials, has the existing posture as the preferred option, with some countries in favour of reviewing DCA status at a later stage. It remains to be seen how the HLG report will be reflected in the DDRP.

Any discussion of nuclear reductions must take account of the relevant language in the new Strategic Concept.

This language means a reduction in the number of US warheads stationed in Europe would be constrained by the agreed NATO consensus position of the need for Russian reciprocity, and by the need for the U.S to develop a next-phase negotiating package that include these sub strategic systems in the next round of bi-lateral negotiations with Russia– a move which in any case would require consultations with the NATO allies. As the Russians have shown little interest in these discussions progress in this area would appear to be blocked.

In order to overcome this impasse former Senator Sam Nunn has proposed that NATO engage in a sustained dialogue with Russia that would include “further reductions of U.S tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, with the announced target of completing the consolidation of U.S tactical nuclear



weapons to the U.S within five years.”<sup>3</sup> This proposal is unlikely to win support because it challenges much conventional thinking on the wisdom of unilateral actions and on how to deal with Russia. Nevertheless it does highlight the need for new thinking in order to get movement that all agree is essential.

If changes to the nuclear posture are eventually seen as desirable then changes to the DCA posture in terms of reduced numbers, consolidation of geographic spread, and lower readiness would seem to be the least problematic. In addition officials note that this option would free up assets for conventional missions while remaining true to the language in the Strategic Concept on the broadest possible participation in nuclear risk and burden-sharing.

No option for change is problem free however, and reactions to date suggest that those countries uneasy about change remain un-persuaded of the need. This also appears to be reflected in the HLG report which is likely to mean a continuation of the status quo. However in view of the upcoming DCA modernisation requirements this too is not without its problems. It will be interesting to see whether the domestic opposition to DCA renewal in Germany and the Netherlands becomes an element in the discussions on possible options at this stage, or whether the discussion continues to take place as if these emerging domestic political and economic constraints do not exist.

It should be noted too, that financial considerations are not restricted to the issue of DCA modernisation but also extend to the costs associated with maintaining safety and security of nuclear weapons storage facilities, and to the potential impact on resources available for conventional forces which are coming under strain in any event from defence cuts.

Several members also want to ensure that NATO declaratory policy is consistent with that of the U.S and U.K. This issue has been raised in both the nuclear and disarmament groups. France, whose nuclear forces are not committed to NATO, is not present in the discussions in the HLG but of course the French Ambassador will be present in the North Atlantic Council for the discussion of any High Level Group input and the final DDPR document. Senior officials have commented on the irony of the situation in which French nuclear forces are not committed to NATO but France has an influence on what the Alliance says about its nuclear forces and posture.

Because the issue of declaratory policy involves national sensitivities, NATO officials believe it can only be settled at the highest level and as one official noted, could “go down to the wire” at the Chicago Summit.

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<sup>3</sup> See Sam Nunn, *The Race between Cooperation and Catastrophe, in Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe: A Framework For Action*, by Steve Andreasen and Isabelle Williams (eds), pp. 21-22.

## Missile Defence

NATO territorial missile defence was accepted as an Alliance mission at the Lisbon Summit as a complement to the existing program to protect deploying forces. The decision consists of integrating the US Phased Adaptive Approach to the existing NATO Project. The agreement was controversial with France reluctant to endorse the principle, as the concept of missile defence is seen in the longer term as threatening the credibility of the French independent nuclear deterrent. NATO officials note that French opposition to the principle of NATO missile defence has since diminished and now focuses on opposing the use of NATO common funding.

Germany also argues that the NATO project could enable a reduction in the existing role of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy, a position with which others, including France, do not agree.

In practice, NATO missile defence is currently proceeding on two tracks. The first track is the development of the NATO program and the integration of the systems used to protect deployed forces with the newer elements being deployed for territorial missile defence. A prospective initial operating capability of May 2012 is the target. The project has broad support as an Alliance project that reinforces solidarity and strengthens the US presence in Europe at a time when the US force presence is declining. This track has been handled by DPPC.

Implementation of the NATO track has focussed attention on the contribution of the European allies and prospective development and procurement decisions. This procurement dimension will also involve NATO's Defence Investment Division which attempts to coordinate and where possible harmonise Alliance procurement projects. The impact of ongoing cuts in defence expenditure on the missile defence project remains unclear.

A second Missile Defence track concerns attempts to reach a cooperative agreement with Russia. This is handled in the NATO-Russia Council which for obvious reasons is not part of the DDR. It would appear that efforts to find common ground are not going well and the two sides remain far apart on the basic parameters of cooperation. The question of missile defence has assumed enormous significance and overshadows all aspects of NATO Russia relations. In the words of one NATO official "it poisons everything".

## The Weapons of Mass Destruction Control and Disarmament Committee (WCDC)

The creation of this Committee was contentious and has remained so with different views on its appropriateness, its role and even on its duration.

As already discussed, some nations want NATO to play a more active role in arms control, disarmament and non proliferation (ADN) and thereby send a message of support for the NPT and the Prague agenda. Others however believe that this is not NATO's role and risks distracting from its original purpose. These discussions and divisions reflect serious differences of perception on NATO's primary purpose and the relevance of ADN in

achieving its goals, and in the view of some, if unresolved could undermine Alliance solidarity and cohesion.

The first tasking by the NAC to the WCDC was to examine the ADN environment with a view to enhancing security. Some interpreted this tasking in a passive sense – namely as a focus on what the ADN environment means for NATO's security, and others in an active sense – as a call to focus on what contribution NATO could make to the ADN environment. This was, according to NATO officials, very problematic, and led to interminable discussions, including over whether to name countries seen as potential threats.

These differences have meant the Committee was unable to reach agreement on the first of its taskings, with the result that its work is being forwarded as a Chairman's report.

A second tasking to this committee was to look concretely at how to improve transparency with Russia. This has been less contentious as it follows the letter of the 10 NATO Foreign Ministers which recommended moving in this direction. However some countries believe that the proposal is based on unrealistic assumptions concerning Russian willingness to reciprocate.

Nevertheless, this tasking has resulted in internal NATO agreement on a wide range of transparency measures, including locations and other exchanges of information with regard to non strategic non nuclear weapons and conventional forces, though some countries remain cautious on the degree of detail to be provided to Russia.

It is clear that in the event that the US begins negotiations with Russia on further arms control involving sub strategic systems then the Committee could constitute a forum for consultation with Allies similar to the role played by the Special Consultative Group for the earlier INF negotiations.

## VI. Prospects

It is still too early to speculate on the prospects for the DDPR and its final status. It has the theoretical potential to give coherence and operational substance to the new Strategic Concept by establishing the links between the various components of the strategy. It also provides a timely opportunity to confront the key issues which could threaten the effectiveness of the Alliance, namely the impact of cuts in defence expenditure; the divisions over the roles of nuclear weapons and disarmament, the impact of missile defence and the need to develop a constructive relationship with Russia.

The most pressing of these is the economic crisis and the resultant decline in the defence expenditures of most members. The assumptions concerning the threats to NATO security have not changed nor therefore have the requirements for the mix of capabilities. But the resources on which current and future plans are based have deteriorated significantly. Is this deterioration sufficiently critical to put in question existing contributions and commitments? Is it sufficiently critical to persuade nations to change their

attitudes and give priority to the collective interests of the Alliance rather than national concerns?

At a minimum the DDPR should review existing commitments to ensure they are consistent with the economic situation and see where adjustments may need to be made. To the degree possible it should urge members to seek maximum coordination and cooperation in achieving their national contributions. Collective actions should be the guiding principle rather than narrow national interest.

In the field of nuclear policy and disarmament the DDPR faces major challenges in reconciling very different perceptions which go to the heart of NATO's identity and role. Those who believe NATO must change its policies in the field of nuclear weapons policy and posture and on the potential role of disarmament are opposed by those who believe such changes would weaken rather than strengthen the Alliance. For others the risks lay in the potential divisions these differences cause and the consequent weakening of Alliance solidarity. NATO cohesion will again for many be the critical element in the discussions ahead.

In the view of the authors of this paper, the key to a successful DDPR lies in it being comprehensive. A comprehensive view is difficult in a single country and even more so in a multilateral alliance. But only a comprehensive view can establish the relationships that are essential to an effective strategy. The comprehensive nature of the Review could also benefit efforts to improve relations with Russia and perhaps the work of the NATO Russia Council (NRC).

The DDPR is an internal NATO exercise and quite separate from the NRC. However, all areas of the DDPR bear in some way on relations with Russia. NATO policy in several fields is in effect hostage to Russian attitudes and actions. Missile defence is said to overshadow and affect all aspects of the relationship. As a result NATO-Russia relations are at an impasse.

It is against this background that the initiative by Senator Nunn should be seen. The DDPR discussions could be useful in identifying ways by which dialogue with Russia can be given new momentum and which could be pursued in the NRC, as for example on the issue of transparency.

This is not easy because the NRC has its own problems and limitations, some of which relate to the insistence of NATO members that there can be no role for Russia in internal NATO affairs and no blurring of the lines between what is handled at 28 in NATO and at 29 in the NRC. Nevertheless, there is potential here to use the DDPR for important diplomatic purposes and signalling, and this opportunity should be taken.

The DDPR could, therefore, make a significant contribution to clarifying the means needed to implement NATO's Strategic Concept and to resolving some of the outstanding problems.

Whether it will realise this theoretical potential will depend on the level and degree of political engagement in national capitals. Currently, according to

many senior NATO officials, this engagement appears to be lacking. Interest in the DDPR is of course a function of competing priorities such as Afghanistan and other international developments and commitments, as well as domestic distractions such as the onset of austerity programmes and upcoming elections.

We will have to wait for Chicago to see whether the DDPR is a document of substance providing a coherent package of capabilities or a communiqué of good intentions forgotten as quickly as it was written. Unfortunately, but as always, political developments will be as significant as doctrinal discussions in determining what place the DDPR will have on the Summit agenda and what impact it will have on future NATO strategy. What is at stake is not only of interest to professional NATO watchers, but potentially the future effectiveness and cohesion of the Alliance, and the security climate across the whole Euro-Atlantic area.