

Session 3: NATO and Extended Deterrence

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Summary

The panel considered the history of NATO, the role that nuclear weapons played in the alliance, and in deterring Soviet aggression, the role of consultation within NATO, and the purpose of nuclear weapons within NATO today.

Michael Lekson (USIP) first laid out the history of NATO from its founding and gradual institutionalization. He also laid out the role of nuclear weapons to the NATO commitment to European defense, both as a signal of US commitment and their centrality within NATO war-fighting doctrine. Jennifer Laurendeau (US State Dept) described NATO's history following the dissolution of the Warsaw pact, focusing particularly on the radical change in the role played by nuclear weapons: in particular the increasing concern over the security and safety of nuclear weapons; concern over non-proliferation and the inheritance of nuclear weapons by states of the former Soviet Union; alongside the reduced threat posed by Russia. The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives to reduce the number and variety of nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, and the gradual effort to reduce the readiness of weapons deployed in Europe were discussed in this light.

Elaine Bunn (NDU) discussed the importance of consultation within NATO on nuclear issues, making four key points. First, consultations among NATO members on nuclear issues have occurred constantly, and at various levels. Second, all NATO nations participate in consultations on nuclear weapons, including those without nuclear weapons deployed on their territories (with the exception of France, which excludes itself to demonstrate the independence of the French *force de frappe*). Third, these consultations were not merely for the purpose of increasing understanding between governments, but also played an important

public diplomacy purpose. Fourth, consultations on nuclear issues have expanded to include missile defense and non-proliferation endeavors.

Peter Schulte (Carnegie Endowment) argued that NATO has been forced to reconsider the role of deterrence, given the question of whether “NATO has any rational enemies left?”, and an unwillingness to accept nuclear deterrence as a permanent hedge against potential future threats. While this is still an elite issue with relatively little resonance among mass publics, he argued that this could change. Issues such as modernizing nuclear bombers deployed in Europe could prove politically challenging. He concluded with some lessons that might be of relevance to Asia: that military alliances that are united, that have some element of a common culture, that face a credible threat, and are willing to be explicit about who their adversaries are, are better able to communicate credible commitments.

Discussion included questions about the possibility of the unilateral withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe in the absence of reciprocal action by Russia, the feasibility of a grand bargain (including conventional arms control) between NATO and Russia, and the importance of nuclear weapons for extended deterrence more generally.

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