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NATO's Strategic Concept, the NPT, and Global Zero

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1. Reconsidering the NATO Strategic Concept

At the 2009 NATO Summit in Strasbourg/Kehl the Alliance Secretary-General was asked to develop a new Strategic Concept. Member Governments called for a participatory review and the Secretary-General appointed a 12-member Group of Experts, chaired by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, to guide the process. Amb. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire, currently the Canadian Ambassador to Austria, is the Canadian member of the group.

The current review is taking place in a new international context that holds the promise of real progress toward zero nuclear weapons; however, reports on discussions to date, as well as the focus of the growing literature on a new Strategic Concept (SC), suggest that the nuclear question is not receiving priority attention. Afghanistan, other regional conflict zones, asymmetric and terrorist threats, and NATO's role as "an armed global defence and police force with serious strategic capacity"¹ are the concerns and roles that are dominating the review process.

That process, in the first and current phase, includes a series of four seminars² (three of which had been held as of early February). In a second phase the experts will visit

NATO capitals to discuss with Governments and Parliamentarians the findings from the seminars. A third and final phase will focus on negotiating a draft Strategic Concept to be approved by Heads of Government scheduled to meet in Portugal in the autumn of 2010.³ The dominant theme – namely, NATO's out-of-area action in an unstable world, including "the challenge of new asymmetric threats, and NATO's engagement in the Middle East and South West Asia" (NATO 2009b) – was addressed in the second of the two experts seminars held to date. The third seminar focused on partnerships.⁴

The topics most closely linked to NATO's nuclear deployments and doctrines were considered during the first seminar (see Note 2 for a brief list of all the topics identified for discussion). The seminar summary reports on discussions of the need for "a tailor-made deterrence" and for NATO to be "ready to operate and reinforce deterrence in a proliferation environment through missile defence and other capabilities." Keeping in mind that this is but a summary of a much longer off-the-record discussion, it may nevertheless be instructive to note that it includes no reference to nuclear arms control and disarmament.

The seminar report does acknowledge that the current Strategic Concept needs “to be reviewed in the context of nuclear policy changes” (NATO 2009a) – and that, in fact, is the focus of the following discussion. It explores appropriate changes to the nuclear weapons elements of NATO’s Strategic Concept with a view to proposing a set of Alliance declarations, policies, and actions that will promote strict conformity to obligations and commitments undertaken through the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and that will advance the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

2. Nuclear Weapons in NATO’s Current Strategic Concept

Nuclear weapons are addressed in nine of the 65 paragraphs of the current SC, adopted by the Washington NATO Summit in 1999 (NATO 1999): paragraph 19 describes advances in arms control and disarmament during the 1990s; paragraph 21 refers to the continued existence of “powerful nuclear forces outside the alliance,” forces which it says need to be taken into account in NATO’s strategic planning; paragraph 37 refers to Ukraine and NATO’s support for it as a non-nuclear weapon state; paragraph 42 describes US nuclear forces in Europe as “vital to the security of Europe”; paragraphs 46 and 62 through 64 set out the core NATO doctrines or “essential principles” governing nuclear weapons in Europe (NATO 2009c); and the ninth reference to nuclear weapons comes in paragraph 65, which simply notes that the Alliance’s conventional and nuclear posture “will be kept under review in the light of the evolving security environment.”

Though relatively brief, the nuclear weapons references in the current SC describe a clear, unambiguous commitment to the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons. The document argues that, due to “the diversity of risks with which the Alliance could be faced, it must maintain the forces necessary to ensure credible deterrence and to provide a wide range of conventional response options.” It then goes

on to say: “[T]he Alliance’s conventional forces alone cannot ensure credible deterrence. Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace.” The SC promises that “the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe” (para 46).

Then in the main doctrinal section on nuclear forces (paras 62-64), deterrence is presented as a broad, essentially open-ended threat to use nuclear weapons against any aggressor – including, by implication, non-nuclear weapon states. It says the purpose of nuclear weapons is to “prevent coercion and any kind of war” and, to accomplish that, nuclear forces are given the “essential role” of “ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies’ response to military aggression” (para 62). As described in a Middle Powers Initiative (MPI) briefing paper, NATO’s policy is one that “permits the use of nuclear weapons when deemed militarily useful in virtually any circumstance” (MPI 2008). European nuclear forces are backed up by the ultimate deterrent, i.e., “the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies,” described as being “provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States” (para 62).

For the broad nuclear deterrent to be credible in the European context, says the SC, European Allies must “be involved in collective defence planning in nuclear roles” and must maintain nuclear forces on European territory (para 63). Indeed, “nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance. The Alliance will therefore maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe” (para 63).

NATO's current Strategic Concept also emphasizes that, given the Alliance's conventional advantage, "the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated ... are therefore extremely remote." Nevertheless, the Alliance decided in 1999 to maintain "adequate sub-strategic forces based in Europe" to provide "an essential link to strategic nuclear forces" and thus to reinforce the transatlantic link (para 64).

3. Toward an NPT-Friendly NATO Strategic Concept

The reference, in the report on the first Strategic Concept review seminar, to the "nuclear policy changes" that are said to help frame the current review, is not elaborated. But it is likely that two kinds of changes were being invoked. The first is the growing concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons materials and capabilities to more states and to non-state actors, and the second is the increasingly declared commitment by at least some NATO states, as well as by their former or traditional adversaries, to the pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons. These are inextricably linked issues, of course. Without progress toward zero, the proliferation threat grows; and without progress in limiting proliferation, the move toward zero will be stymied.

NATO's current insistence that its retention of nuclear weapons is "essential to preserve peace" (para 46) is clearly out of sync with both of these imperatives. Resistance to disarmament inevitably generates incentives to proliferate. NATO doctrine is not in step with Article VI of the NPT, the advancing nuclear disarmament imperative as articulated in President Obama's Prague speech (2009), the UN Security Council Resolution 1887 (UNSC 2009), and the public declarations of a broad range of Governments and individuals prominent in international security affairs. But the 2009 NATO Summit created a timely opportunity to once again rethink and restate the Alliance's strategic doctrine.⁵ It is a

rethinking process that should a) welcome and affirm the groundswell of calls for a world without nuclear weapons; b) confirm NATO's commitment to the objectives of the NPT and declare that the intent of Article VI is a world free of nuclear weapons; and c) commit NATO to security and arms control policies that conform to Articles I and II of the NPT and that are designed to achieve the nuclear disarmament promised in Article VI.

Both the rationale and the language for this new NATO approach to nuclear weapons are available in the burgeoning anthology of nuclear abolition statements, as well as in the logic on which the NPT was originally constructed – namely, that nuclear weapons, far from being "essential to preserve peace" (para 46), are ultimately an unacceptable risk to humanity. The new NATO Strategic Concept should thus quite simply state that the elimination of nuclear weapons, not their retention, is essential to security. Rather than asserting that the "strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance" are "the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies" (para 62), NATO's new Strategic Concept must reflect the new reality articulated by Mikhail Gorbachev's (2007) warning that "with every passing year [nuclear weapons] make our security more precarious." Indeed, a new NATO statement could borrow from the 2008 statement by Henry Kissinger and his colleagues and thus also acknowledge that "without the vision of moving toward zero, we will not find the essential cooperation required to stop our downward spiral" toward greater insecurity (Shultz et al. 2008).

With a formal acknowledgement of the risks of a nuclear-armed world, and with abolition endorsed as a strategic objective and core value, it would be understandable for NATO to note, as does the Obama nuclear abolitionist policy, that the road to abolition must be traveled by all nuclear weapon states together. The 1999 document makes this point with the acknowledgement that "the existence of powerful nuclear forces outside the Alliance also constitutes a

significant factor which the Alliance has to take into account if security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area are to be maintained” (para 21). Although in 1999 the paragraph read as a rationale for the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons, in a new context of abolition, that same statement becomes a compelling call for accelerated multilateral engagement in the interests of mutual disarmament.

The current Strategic Concept says that the fundamental purpose of NATO nuclear forces is “political” (para 62) – without offering any clarity on how weapons can be political without also being military, and thus militarily threatening, and without recognizing that such a military nuclear threat acts as an incentive to those threatened to retain and acquire similar nuclear threats. On this point Canada has historically offered more constructive alternative language. The Government’s 1999 response (Canada 1999) to a Parliamentary Committee report on nuclear disarmament (Graham 1998) agreed with the Committee recommendation, and thus the Government of the day promised that Canada would “work consistently to reduce the political legitimacy and value of nuclear weapons in order to contribute to the goal of their progressive reduction and eventual elimination.” It is language that found its way into Step 9[v] of the “practical disarmament steps” adopted in 2000 at the NPT Review Conference in which nuclear weapon states agreed to “a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies to minimize the risk that these weapons will ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination” (RevCon 2000). And it is language that should find its way into a new Strategic Concept.

Two other references to nuclear weapons in the current Strategic Concept are badly dated. The discussion of arms control (para 19) is rooted in the 1990s. An update of disarmament references in a new Strategic Concept should emphasize the urgency of disarmament, declare it essential to preserving peace, and welcome a new US-

Russian agreement on strategic arms reduction as setting the stage for subsequent rounds of further reductions, noting the importance of early engagement in the process by all states with nuclear weapons. The document’s reference to NATO-Ukraine relations (para 37) is also rooted in the early post-Cold War period. While it emphasizes and welcomes Ukraine’s new status as a non-nuclear weapon state, the central point behind the reference is NATO enlargement. In a new document, the issue of NATO membership should be recalibrated, not only to take account of the legitimate security fears and interests of Russia, but also to focus on the development of mutual security arrangements throughout the entire region of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, rather than the expansion of a military alliance to selected states within the region.

4. Nuclear Forces in Europe

The current Strategic Concept is also at odds with the principles and intent of the NPT when it emphasizes (in paras 42, 63, and 64) the importance of retaining tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, for deterrence and especially to link Europe and North America. There are currently estimated to be between 150 and 240 nuclear weapons, all US B61 gravity bombs, held in five countries in Europe – Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey (Kristensen 2008). All of the European countries hosting these US nuclear weapons are non-nuclear weapon states parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The future of those deployments is now under active discussion, particularly in light of the German Government’s explicit call for the removal of nuclear weapons from German territory (Meier 2009). Former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (2009) had earlier written that “all remaining U.S. nuclear warheads should be withdrawn from German territory,” and since then Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle has taken up the call within the North Atlantic

Council and in discussions with European allies, including Poland, a strong advocate of continued nuclear deployments in Europe (Butcher 2009c). *Arms Control Today* reports that the German Government regards its “initiative both as a disarmament measure and a contribution to nuclear nonproliferation.” “We want to send a signal and fulfill our commitments under the NPT 100 percent,” a German Government spokesperson is quoted as saying (Meier 2009).

Martin Butcher’s blog, *The NATO Monitor* (2009a, 2009b), reports that Turkey has indicated it “would not insist” that NATO maintain forward deployed nuclear weapons in Europe; Italy has indicated openness to reconsidering NATO’s nuclear posture; the UK Government has agreed that the NATO nuclear posture be reviewed in the context of calls for a world without nuclear weapons; and the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway have all indicated support for the German Government’s move.

The Canadian Government should join this initiative and publicly indicate its support for the removal of all remaining nuclear weapons (all of them non-strategic) from European soil, in support of longstanding international calls that all nuclear weapons be returned to the territories of the states that own them.

Given the extraordinary historical, political, social, and economic links between Europe and North America, it seems oddly contrived to continue to claim that the presence of nuclear weapons on the territories of European non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT is essential to transatlantic solidarity. Furthermore, without the removal of nuclear weapons from the territories of non-nuclear weapon states in Europe, those states and the US as the supplier state cannot claim full compliance with Articles I and II of the Treaty. The NPT requires that “each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient

whatsoever [and non-nuclear weapon states undertake not to receive] nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly.”

Germany has emphasized that the decision on the future of nuclear deployments in Europe should be a collective NATO decision rather than a series of unilateral or bilateral changes. That means the decision will require a consensus within NATO, obviously including the concurrence of Washington. Indeed, the current US Administration brings a new openness to the issue. For example, the current US Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, has a strong personal interest in nuclear disarmament and has written in support of the pursuit of global zero (Daalder & Lodal 2008). Even the late Michael Quinlan (2007), a British security analyst and former Permanent Secretary of Defence, while generally resisting changes to nuclear elements of NATO’s Strategic Concept, expressed doubts about the value of US nuclear weapons in Europe: “I doubt whether their permanent presence remains essential nowadays either in military and deterrent terms or as a symbol of continuing US commitment to the security of its European allies.”

5. NATO and Russia

Some NATO states that may support in principle the removal of US nuclear weapons from Europe may nevertheless argue against change at this time on the grounds that the removal of tactical nuclear weapons from Europe should be coordinated with significant reductions in Russia’s tactical nuclear arsenal. And it is true that not only Russian tactical nuclear weapons, but relations with Russia on a much broader level, will be central to achieving sustainable changes within NATO.

Despite the end of the Cold War, Russia has never stopped thinking of NATO as an anti-Russian institution, and the events

surrounding the Russia-Georgia war of 2008 only reinforced that perception (Antonenko & Giegerich 2009). NATO's expansion to the east in the post-Cold War era has created further disquiet in Russia – not to mention that it has also represented the steady geographic expansion of the West's nuclear umbrella in clear violation of the spirit, at least, of the commitment to “a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies” (RevCon 2000).

For these reasons, in the context of denuclearizing Europe, it will be necessary to take up the Kissinger call for a dialogue “within NATO and with Russia, now begun by Presidents Obama and Medvedev, on consolidating the nuclear weapons designed for forward deployment to enhance their security, and as a first step toward careful accounting for them and their eventual elimination” (Shultz et al. 2008). Progress toward that end will obviously require a new kind of strategic relationship with Russia⁶ and active engagement with it in pursuit of reductions to its non-strategic nuclear weapons arsenal. The huge imbalance in conventional forces between Russia and NATO will certainly be a challenge. Russia accounts for less than 6 per cent of world military spending while NATO states collectively account for more than 60 per cent (IISS 2008). As long as Russia regards this overwhelming conventional force as, if not necessarily an overt enemy, then a challenge to its regional interests, it is unlikely to be amenable to significant further reductions to its substantial arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons.

That does not mean the denuclearization of Europe should be contingent on Russian tactical nuclear disarmament. In fact, Quinlan (2007) argued that the removal of US nuclear weapons from Europe would “have the effect of depriving Russia of a pretext she has sometimes sought to exploit both for opposing NATO's wider development and for evading the question of whether and why Russia herself need continue to maintain a non-strategic

nuclear armoury that is now far larger than that of anyone else.”

A Rand Corporation study of multiple strategic options for NATO sums up the core elements of a NATO strategy to reinforce European stability: an upgrade of the NATO-Russia Council, a freeze on NATO enlargement, and the engagement of all NATO states in East-West disarmament discussions (Chivvis 2009). The German diplomat Rüdiger Lüdeking (2007) calls for overall NATO leadership in a reinvigorated disarmament dialogue with Russia. Such engagement should promote continuing strategic dialogue between the US and Russia in support of a new Treaty and follow-on disarmament measures that engage other states with nuclear weapons; promote NATO-led negotiations, perhaps in the context of the NATO-Russia Council; encourage reporting to the NPT by NATO and Russia of current holdings of non-strategic nuclear weapons (aggregate numbers of warheads and delivery vehicles); encourage more detailed information through confidential exchanges on alert status, security provisions, and safety features; develop new agreements on security and safety measures, deployment restrictions, and reductions; and encourage expansion of such discussions on reductions to the global level.

In the long run, of course, NATO and the West will also be served by seeking a new strategic relationship with China as well.

6. No-First-Use

It is rather striking that none of the likely threats to the security of NATO states is effectively, or even marginally, deterred by NATO's European nuclear weapons or by its implied first-use threat. The threats that most worry NATO planners include asymmetrical attacks, terrorism, cyber attacks, attacks with weapons of mass destruction from non-state actors, and long-range missiles (NATO 2009a). The nuclear capabilities of NATO states may be regarded as a deterrent to any long-range missile

threat, but the credibility of such a deterrent is not served by the deployment of US tactical weapons on European soil, nor does it require the threat of first use.

A central element of the revised Strategic Concept, in the context of a commitment to reduce and eliminate nuclear arsenals, should therefore be a rejection of first-use threats through a no-first-use commitment and a redefinition of deterrence that confines the role of nuclear arsenals to deterring the use of nuclear weapons by others.

Scott Sagan draws the same conclusion regarding US policy: “the United States should, after appropriate consultation with allies, move toward adopting a nuclear-weapons no-first-use declaratory policy by stating that ‘the role of US nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear weapons use by other nuclear-weapons states against the United States, our allies, and our armed forces, and to be able to respond, with an appropriate range of nuclear retaliation options, if necessary, in the event that deterrence fails’” (Sagan 2009). Despite his reference to a range of “legitimate” retaliation options, Sagan argues that a no-first-use declaration would reinforce US and NATO support for diminishing the role of nuclear weapons.

7. Canada and the Strategic Concept Review

Canada’s should pursue active engagement in the NATO Strategic Concept review in support of changes to the Alliance’s declarations and policies that promote strict adherence to NPT obligations and commitments, and that advance the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

a) Revising the core principles of the Strategic Concept:

New language in the strategic concept should:

i) welcome and affirm the groundswell of calls for a world without nuclear weapons;

ii) confirm NATO’s commitment to the objectives of the NPT, and declare that the intent of Article VI is a world free of nuclear weapons;

iii) commit NATO to security and arms control policies that ensure full conformity to Articles I and II of the NPT (by eliminating nuclear sharing), and that are designed to achieve the nuclear disarmament promised in Article VI;

iv) declare that the elimination of nuclear weapons, not their retention, is essential to the security of NATO members;

v) pledge NATO to work consistently to reduce the political legitimacy and value of nuclear weapons in order to contribute to the goal of their progressive reduction and eventual elimination.

b) Nuclear forces out of Europe:

i) Canada should give encouragement to the efforts of European allies toward removing all remaining nuclear weapons from the territories of non-nuclear weapon state members of NATO, in support of longstanding international calls that all nuclear weapons be returned to the territories of the states that own them.

c) NATO relations with Russia (and China):

Canada should support the development of a new strategic relationship with Russia (and China) through initiatives such as:

i) an upgrade of the NATO-Russia Council;

ii) restraint on NATO enlargement efforts;

iii) the engagement of all NATO states in reinvigorated East-West disarmament discussions, with a particular focus on non-strategic nuclear weapons;

iv) promoting a continuing strategic dialogue between the US and Russia in support of a new Treaty and follow-on

measures that engage other states with nuclear weapons;

v) encouraging enhanced reporting to the NPT by NATO and Russia of current holdings of non-strategic nuclear weapons (aggregate numbers of warheads and delivery vehicles);

vi) encouraging more detailed information through confidential exchanges on alert status, security provisions, and safety features;

vii) developing new agreements on security and safety measures, deployment restrictions, and reductions; and encouraging expansion of such discussions on reductions to the global level; and

viii) engaging China in relevant mutual approaches to strategic stability and nuclear disarmament.

d) No-first-use:

In the process of pursuing a world without nuclear weapons, NATO should implement a basic shift in its deterrence doctrine:

i) through adoption of a no-first-use commitment; and

ii) by confining the role of nuclear weapons to exclusively deter the use of nuclear weapons by other states until such time as arsenals are universally prohibited and eliminated.

Note: This paper was originally prepared as Annex I to the Briefing Paper prepared for the January 25-26, 2010 Ottawa Conference: "Practical Steps to Zero Nuclear Weapons." The conference was sponsored by the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the Canadian Pugwash Group, Physicians for Global Survival, Project Ploughshares, and the World Federalist Movement – Canada. The Conference Briefing Paper is available at: <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/Abolish/ZeroNukesBriefPapJan2010.pdf>.

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Notes

1. This is how Senator Hugh Segal characterized NATO and the challenge of transforming NATO into an effective global security presence. Speech to the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, October 6, 2009. See Pugliese 2009.

2. Seminar topics include:

- "NATO's core tasks and functions: the meaning of collective defence and deterrence in today's environment; how to confront a broader spectrum of threats to our populations; NATO's role in disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation."
- "NATO as a part of a network of security actors in contributing to global civil and military crisis management and NATO's likely tasks with a view to enhancing cooperation with international organisations and NGOs."
- "NATO and the Euro-Atlantic security environment: NATO's role in building security in the Euro-Atlantic area, enlargement and NATO's partnerships including relations with Russia."
- "Forces and capabilities, including defence planning and transformation" and "procurement at a time of increased financial constraints."

See NATO 2010.

3. Information on the process is available on a Strategic Concept section of the NATO website: <http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/index.html>.

4. NATO's brief news report on it is available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_60693.htm?mode=news.

5. The Alliance's Strategic Concepts have gone through successive changes. The original focused on collective operations for the territorial defence of its member territories; in the mid-1950s "massive retaliation," including nuclear, was emphasized; in 1967 "flexible response" replaced "massive retaliation"; in 1991 there was a new emphasis on cooperation with former adversaries; and in 1999 a commitment was added to wider Euro-Atlantic peace and

stability and non-Article 5 operations. The current debate is focused on further development of out-of-area operational guidelines. Throughout this evolutionary process the Alliance has always agreed on a nuclear component and affirmed nuclear deterrence. See NATO 2002 and Hatfield 2000.

6. A point forcefully made in Steinbruner 2009.

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