

NATO's Nuclear Sharing: A Threat to the NPT

*Convenors: Martin Butcher and Nicola Butler, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy
Speaker: Mayor Leidig*

Introduction

Dear Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates. As Mayor of Schwaebisch Gmuend, I represent a city from which nuclear mass destruction could have started, as the command of the Perhing II missiles was based there until the entry into force of the INF Treaty. Today, my city is nuclear weapon free and the threat of general war between East and West has vanished, but NATO's nuclear weapons and its policy of nuclear sharing are topics which, unfortunately, still have to be addressed. I present you the thoughts of the NGO community.

NATO Nuclear Policy

Since its formation, NATO has argued that the collective security provided by its nuclear posture is shared among all members of the Alliance, providing reassurance to any member that might otherwise feel vulnerable. The most recent NATO Nuclear Planning Group Final Communiqué reaffirmed this, stating "... NATO's nuclear forces are maintained at the minimum level sufficient to preserve peace and stability. In keeping with this goal, we continue to place great value on the nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO, which provide an essential political and military link between the European and North American members of the Alliance. "

NATO's Strategic Concept

NATO's Strategic Concept requires widespread participation by European Allies in collective defence planning in nuclear roles, the basing of nuclear forces on their territory and consultation in command and control arrangements. NATO nuclear forces include strategic weapons provided by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, along with US 'sub-strategic' or 'tactical' nuclear weapons deployed in Europe. Within NATO these substrategic weapons are seen as symbolic of the transatlantic link between the United States and its European allies. We regard them as highly contentious and counterproductive. NATO itself argues these weapons serve a political, rather than an explicit deterrent purpose. Nuclear sharing is regarded, it seems, as a bonding experience for NATO nations. A bonding experience that violates the intent of Articles I and II of the NPT, and once the custody of the weapon is transferred from the US military to the host nation, actually violates the Treaty.

Five Non Nuclear-Weapon States (NNWS) parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Turkey – participate in nuclear sharing arrangements with the United States. These countries host US B61 'gravity' bombs that, in the event of nuclear war, could be delivered by aircraft and pilots belonging to the host nations. The United Kingdom also hosts US nuclear weapons, USAF aircraft and pilots. Previously Greece also participated in nuclear sharing, but in 2003 US nuclear weapons were reportedly withdrawn from the country. The secure storage vaults for the nuclear weapons are still maintained, however, allowing for possible return of the B61 bombs in the future. Authoritative sources state

that Poland has been quietly suggesting within NATO that it would be willing to participate in nuclear sharing. This would contravene assurances given to Russia before Poland joined NATO by both NATO and the United States, and would be a serious blow to the global non-proliferation regime.

Many in Europe question this nuclear sharing. We welcome recent moves by parliamentarians, particularly in Belgium, but also in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, calling for the removal of NATO nuclear weapons from Europe. Mayors near all the deployment sites in Europe have called for the removal of the nuclear weapons from their communities.

Article I of the NPT states that:

Each nuclear weapons State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly or indirectly.

Article II imposes a complementary obligation on NNWS not to “receive the transfer” of nuclear weapons. NATO nuclear sharing appears to breach these obligations. NATO argues that nuclear sharing is compatible with the NPT, based on a US interpretation that it does “not involve any transfer of nuclear weapons or control over them unless and until a decision were made to go to war, at which time the treaty would no longer be in effect”. Since the mid-1990s, this interpretation has become increasingly controversial. At the 1995 NPT Review Conference, Mexico asked for clarification on whether nuclear sharing breached Articles I and II. Mexico's concerns were taken up by the Non-Aligned Movement. Several proposals questioning the US interpretation were put forward for inclusion in the Committee's final report, including:

The Conference notes that among States parties there are various interpretations of the implementation of certain aspects of Articles I and II which need clarification, especially regarding the obligations of nuclear weapon States parties...when acting in cooperation with groups of nuclear-weapon States parties under regional arrangements...

In 1998, Egypt proposed that “the 2000 Review Conference state in clear and unambiguous terms that Articles I and II of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons allow for no exceptions and that the NPT is binding on States Parties at all times”. This mirrored the language of the final document of the 1985 Review Conference in which States Party to the NPT agreed by consensus that Articles I and II apply “under any circumstances”. No NATO states dissented from that consensus.

In 1999, the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) proposed that, “all the articles of the NPT are binding on all States Parties and at all times and in all circumstances”.

The 2000 NPT Final Document contains a number of commitments relevant to NATO Member States:

- * the need for further unilateral reductions in nuclear arsenals;
- * increased transparency;

- * further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons;
- * measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems; and
- * a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies.

In 2005, the Non-Aligned Movement opening statement given by Malaysia as well as Egypt's opening remarks both questioned the NATO nuclear sharing arrangement.

Despite this continued criticism within the NPT context, and even though the 1985 statement which is now part of the NPT's legal 'acquis', NATO's Strategic Concept describes nuclear weapons as the "supreme guarantee" of Allied security, and the practise of nuclear sharing continues. Recent figures published by the Federation of American Scientists indicate that the number of U.S. nuclear warheads based in Europe has been cut from about 480 to around 350, with the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Ramstein in Germany. NATO does not publish any figures on the numbers of nuclear weapons based in Europe.

NATO's nuclear posture has also proved a major obstacle to progress in negative security assurances (NSAs) as proposed by the 1995 Review Conference, and rules out any possibility of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Europe. According to NATO Secretary General Guy Roberts, proposals to extend official NATO policy to allow for the use of nuclear weapons against the use or even the threat of use of chemical, biological and radiological weapons are "... a key current issue for us..", but are still controversial. An attempt to include pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons against a WMD-armed adversary in the NATO CMX 2002 exercise was so controversial with European nations (other than the UK and Turkey) that the exercise was terminated early. Rather than strengthening NSA's and the non-proliferation regime, NATO is aiming to weaken them further.

In conclusion, while NATO welcomed and endorsed the results of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, there has been no significant change in nuclear posture based on the 2000 agreements.

Mr. Chairman,

These nuclear weapons sharing arrangements are a major impediment to the fulfilment of the objectives of the NPT. We believe it is time for them to be openly and systematically challenged and for Nuclear Weapons States and Non-Nuclear Weapons States in Europe to abide by their respective obligations under the Treaty. Removal of US nuclear weapons from Europe will increase the credibility of NATO non-nuclear weapons states calling for disarmament and non-proliferation, and strengthen the NPT. Most of the European nuclear sharing nations will have to decide soon whether to procure a new generation of dual capable aircraft for the nuclear mission, or whether these new aircraft should be purely conventional in nature. This presents NATO's nations with an excellent opportunity to live up fully to their obligations under Articles I and II, and to answer the call of civil society in these nations, who urge for nuclear weapons to be removed from their territories, such as the 67,248 Italian citizens who asked for Italy to become a nuclear weapon free zone on 27 March 2008.

We urge that:

1. This PrepCom recommends to the 2010 NPT Review Conference the reaffirmation of the 1985 Review Conference language that the Treaty is binding in all circumstances, and that the 2010 Review Conference further states that Articles I and II of the Treaty allow for no exceptions.
2. All remaining US nuclear weapons are withdrawn from Europe. These weapons are militarily obsolete and are no longer relevant to transatlantic relations.
3. NATO conducts a review of its Strategic Concept including a diminished role for nuclear weapons and a commitment to no first use of nuclear weapons as first steps to their complete removal from European soil.
4. The United States and Russia negotiate a verifiable treaty on the elimination of all substrategic, or tactical, nuclear weapons.