

# **NATO's nuclear agenda: Recommendations for action**

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NATO's 19 member states are currently engaged in a process of developing new policies for arms control and disarmament. At their Florence meeting in May 2000, allied foreign ministers stated that they were expecting to receive a "substantive report" on a "comprehensive and integrated review" in December 2000.[1] This policy review is taking place following a decision of NATO heads of state and government at the April 1999 summit in Washington.

NATO has been engaged in developing arms control and disarmament strategies for more than 30 years. In agreeing to "The Future Tasks of the Alliance" in 1967, NATO stated for the first time that "military security and a policy of détente are not contradictory but complimentary" and further outlined that the "allies are studying disarmament and practical arms control measures." [2] The most recent arms control strategy agreed by the Alliance was in 1989 when the allies agreed a "comprehensive concept of arms control and disarmament." [3] They laid out the allies' "ambitious arms control agenda for the coming years in the nuclear, conventional and chemical fields." Since that time there has been dramatic progress in all of these areas.

Today, however, the agenda designed during the East-West confrontation is exhausted and outdated. The question arises as to what actions the Alliance now should take to implement the remit laid down by the 1999 summit.

There are many factors which will decide whether NATO's process becomes an asset or a hindrance to global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. Amongst these are:

- Reluctance on the part of the nations which host US sub-strategic weapons to consider new transparency measures for fear of unleashing unwelcome new political and environmental debates, both domestically and in fora such as the process for reviewing and implementing the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- Continued belief within NATO in the applicability of the Strategic Concept agreed in 1999.
- Widespread uncertainty over the possible effects of the US National Missile Defence (NMD) program on the global arms control architecture, especially the START process.
- Long timelines for progress on cooperation with Russia, especially in light of the Kosovo conflict and NMD.
- The large volume of other work on NATO's books, not least the US-led Defence Capabilities Initiative, the relationship with the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the continuing NATO operations in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Isolation of Canada as the only ally prepared to put serious diplomatic weight behind arms control issues in internal alliance discussions.
- Serious concerns over the state, safety and location of Russian sub-strategic arsenal.
- Proliferation developments in parts of the world such as North Korea, the Middle East and South Asia.

## **Commitment to NPT provisions**

*N.B. The order of the recommendations below follows that of the final document issued by the NPT 2000 Review Conference, rather than that of the authors. It is important to note that the NPT Review Conference document leaves some of the more fundamental policy issues until later in the list, despite the fact that decision-making on these matters naturally will govern other issues mentioned earlier in the list.*

A key decision made by the international community in 2000 was the package of practical measures to further the implementation of Article VI of the NPT, agreed at the NPT Review Conference in New York. The following analysis of practical measures the Alliance might take to further the decisions made at the NPT Review Conference concentrates on the measures agreed in respect to Article VI,[4] and does not address issues of security assurances or nuclear-weapon-free zones,[5] since there is an existing

body of proposals on these matters. However, the issue of the universal application of the NPT is one that has not received sufficient attention.

## **Universal application of the NPT**

*The NPT Review Conference reaffirmed the need for strict and universal adherence to the treaty by all states parties.* In the period 1995-2000 and at the Review Conference itself, a number of states raised concerns about various aspects of NATO nuclear policy. There are a number of highly technical legal and historical issues which arise.[6] Leaving these issues aside, however, a more fundamental one remains – that is, applicability of the NPT to NATO nations also tied by allied nuclear doctrine.

Alliance policy of supporting the universal application of the NPT is not consistent with the exceptions that NATO members claim for themselves in relation to each other. How can non-nuclear states within NATO base their security policies upon nuclear weapons at the same time as claiming the status of Non-Nuclear Weapon States under the NPT? Three states recently joined NATO and included nuclear weapons in their national defence policies, and eight more are seeking NATO membership. By the time of the 2005 NPT Review Conference, it is quite possible that the number of Western states basing their security policy upon nuclear weapons will have increased from 16 in 1995, to 27 or more in 2005.

NATO's Nuclear Planning Group, for example, routinely receives briefings on the nuclear arsenals of the United Kingdom and the United States, and the part they play in the security policy of all members of the Alliance. While NATO members all subscribe to Alliance strategy, they make individual national decisions as to their level of participation. Iceland, with no armed forces, is not in the Nuclear Planning Group. Also excluded is France, despite its nuclear weapons capability.

**Current NATO policy/practice:** At present, the Alliance view is that its policies are entirely consistent with the NPT.

**Recommendations:** The Alliance should state that, in the present security environment, nuclear weapons should no longer form part of the defence policy of non-nuclear member states, and begin to take steps to implement this policy at the national level. NATO members should be making national decisions to implement the NPT to the fullest, as well collective ones.

### **The NPT 2000 Rev Con Decisions on implementing Article VI of the NPT and the relevant decisions of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference**

1. *The importance and urgency of signatures and ratifications, without delay and without conditions and in accordance with constitutional processes, to achieve the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO has supported the early entry into force of the CTBT, but is somewhat constrained in its ability to do so by the reluctance of its senior ally to ratify. In a 15 November 1999 resolution, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly urged the United States Senate to reconsider its position on ratification.

**Recommendations:** NATO members should continue to ask the US administration to re-submit the CTBT to the Senate. With the recent ratifications of Iceland and Portugal, the United States is now the only NATO state that is not a full party to the treaty. NATO allies also should ensure that the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT Organisation receives the funding and technical support necessary to fulfil its mandate.

2. *A moratorium on nuclear-weapon-test explosions or any other nuclear explosions pending entry into force of that treaty.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** France and the United Kingdom have ratified and

continue to stand by their CTBT commitments. The United States continues to honour its self-imposed moratorium and has stated that it will not resume testing, although some politicians continue to question this position and propose legislation that would undermine this position. In a March 6, 2000 statement, President Bill Clinton said: "We will continue to honour the US moratorium on nuclear testing and work to establish a universal ban through the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty." [7]

**Recommendations:** Other NATO states should make it clear that it expects both candidates for the U.S. presidential elections to refrain from testing were they to become President. They also should press upon members of the U.S. Congress that a resumption of testing, or development of new nuclear weapons as being proposed by some members, such as Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.), would be destabilising. Alliance members further should individually and/or collectively state that they see no requirement for new nuclear weapons that might necessitate testing.

3. *The necessity of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices in accordance with the statement of the Special Coordinator in 1995 and the mandate contained therein, taking into consideration both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation objectives. The Conference on Disarmament is urged to agree on a programme of work which includes the immediate commencement of negotiations on such a treaty with a view to their conclusion within five years.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO communiqués consistently have called for a 'fissban' for several years, and the United Kingdom and France have made considerable unilateral efforts in this regard. Other member states, such as Canada, have commissioned national studies on the issue.

**Recommendations:** The Alliance now should begin to address seriously issues surrounding a fissban, such as naval fuel and current stocks, in order to help the Conference on Disarmament achieve this goal by the 2005 NPT Review Conference. The United Kingdom has stated a particular interest in a cut-off treaty and should use its influence to push other allies into more enthusiastic positions.

NATO allies further should examine the compatibility of US plans for a NMD network with a fissile material production ban. US deployment of NMD may make such a ban strategically impossible for some countries such as China.

4. *The necessity of establishing in the Conference on Disarmament an appropriate subsidiary body with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament. The Conference on Disarmament is urged to agree on a programme of work which includes the immediate establishment of such a body.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO as a whole has made no such calls for action. However, the informal 'NATO-5' group [8] did propose a working group on nuclear disarmament at the Conference on Disarmament in 1999 and there are divisions of opinion on this issue within the Alliance.

**Recommendations:** NATO should state publicly that it supports 'talks on talks' on nuclear disarmament, as some allies have indicated in private. In a May 25, 2000, letter to BASIC, a diplomat from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office wrote: "[W]e, France and the United States could support the establishment of a CD subsidiary body with a mandate to discuss nuclear disarmament. But we do not believe that the conditions yet exist to make starting negotiations on nuclear disarmament in Geneva a practical proposition." [9] (Emphasis in the original letter).

5. *The principle of irreversibility to apply to nuclear disarmament, nuclear and other related arms control and reduction measures.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO has not made it a priority to talk about irreversibility in the past, and it remains the case that UK and French nuclear weapons are

not covered by any current arms control arrangements.

**Recommendations:** NATO should state publicly that those nuclear weapons already withdrawn from deployment will never be deployed again and that it will not request any further increases in the size of nuclear weapons assigned to it.

It would also be helpful if the Alliance made a statement concerning certain irreversible measures taken by France, the United Kingdom and the United States in relation to aspects of fissile material production and stocks.

6. *An unequivocal undertaking by the Nuclear Weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States Parties are committed under Article VI.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** Current NATO nuclear policy, as set out in the 1999 Strategic Concept, states: "The supreme guarantee of the security of the allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States;" It goes on: "The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war. They will continue to fulfil an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the allies' response to military aggression." [10] It seems clear, therefore, that NATO is not currently committed to rejecting the nuclear weapons assigned to it.

**Recommendations:** NATO seems to require that the world becomes totally peaceful before nuclear disarmament can be envisaged and, in this sense, does not represent the views of individual allied governments as stated at NPT Review Conferences. NATO could best support the future disarmament success of the NPT by removing the requirement for nuclear weapons from its defence policy.

7. *The early entry into force and full implementation of START II and the conclusion of START III as soon as possible while preserving and strengthening the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability and as a basis for further reductions of strategic offensive weapons, in accordance with its provisions.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO consistently has supported the START process, whilst stating that it remains a bilateral one. In a 1997 defence ministers' communiqué, for example, NATO welcomed progress on START II and called the ABM treaty 'an important element of strategic stability for over 25 years.' [11]

**Recommendations:** NATO should continue to support, and urge progress, under the START process, as success would clearly improve security for the allies and the rest of the world. Progress on START III could enable the United States to include the sub-strategic nuclear weapons currently assigned to NATO.

France and the United Kingdom also should encourage China to join them as observers in the START process, in order to prepare for their eventual inclusion in any START IV agreement.

Finally, NATO members must continue to support the ABM treaty, a foundation stone for the START process. Other allies therefore should press the United States to abandon its current NMD plan.

8. *The completion and implementation of the Trilateral Initiative between the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the International Atomic Energy Agency.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** This is obviously a three-way process in which NATO is not formally involved.

**Recommendations:** The Alliance should take advantage of its existing Science Programme in order to support the Trilateral Initiative and involve scientists from partner nations, such as Ukraine and Russia. The Alliance should also make sure the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has the funding to carry out this work, a problem to which the IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei, alluded in his recent address to the 2000 NPT Review Conference. [12]

9. *Steps by all the Nuclear Weapon States leading to nuclear disarmament in a way that*

*promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all: Further efforts by the Nuclear Weapon States to reduce their nuclear arsenals unilaterally.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** All three NATO Nuclear Weapon States have reduced their nuclear arsenals since the Cold War, as has NATO as a whole. There is not much support for further unilateral cuts, however, outside the START framework.

**Recommendations:** NATO's three Nuclear Weapon States, Britain, France and the United States, should move to single-warhead submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), following the successful START II pattern for intercontinental ballistic missiles. NATO, and the three allies individually, should further state that they no longer have a requirement for multiple warhead SLBMs, and consider establishing verification measures.

The United States unilaterally should retire its submarine-launched cruise missiles and dismantle the warheads. NATO then should remove the requirement for keeping this option available.

The United States should reconsider its requirement for forward-basing in Europe free-fall nuclear bombs for US aircraft.

- *Increased transparency by the Nuclear Weapon States with regard to the nuclear weapons capabilities and the implementation of agreements pursuant to Article VI and as a voluntary confidence-building measure to support further progress on nuclear disarmament.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** France, the United Kingdom and the United States maintain differing levels of transparency with regard to their nuclear arsenals, although all nuclear doctrines remain classified. NATO continues to insist that its military strategy, MC400/2, remains classified as well. Furthermore, allies almost uniformly are reluctant to give details of sub-strategic weapons based in Europe.

**Recommendations:** As an initial sign of renewed commitment, the December report to ministers outlining which "options" NATO might continue work should be released as a public document. Within the context of NATO-Russia relations, and allied NPT commitments, NATO must lead by moving to increase transparency. NATO should declare the numbers and locations of its sub-strategic nuclear weapons and de-classify, as far as possible, nuclear doctrines and military strategies including key documents of the NATO Military Committee such as MC 400/2. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly and national parliaments have a crucial role to play in requesting more transparency and accountability, and must intensify their efforts in this regard.

- *The further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons, based on unilateral initiatives and as an integral part of the nuclear arms reduction and disarmament process.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO has reduced its deployed non-strategic arsenal by around 85 percent since 1991, including eliminating nuclear artillery and ground-launched short-range nuclear missiles. The Alliance and the United States have been considering a further initiative in the area of non-strategic nuclear weapons since the Helsinki summit of US President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in 1997. Many allied nations, however, are reluctant to go further for fear of abandoning the practice of involving allies in nuclear planning and/or jeopardising the transatlantic link.

**Recommendations:** Individual NATO members currently taking part in nuclear sharing arrangements with the United States should abandon the policy of maintaining a nuclear role for their aircraft, and terminate bilateral programs of cooperation with the US military that make such a role possible.

Individual NATO members and the Alliance as a whole should state that there is no longer a requirement for non-strategic nuclear weapons.

An interim step might be to follow the current US practice for its submarine-launched cruise missiles and remove air-launched nuclear warheads from Europe to the United States for peacetime storage.

- *Concrete agreed measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** Proposals for a 'no-first-use' posture have been shelved. However, NATO nuclear weapons apparently are not targeted at any country and, according to a 1997 communiqué, NATO has reduced the number and readiness of its dual capable aircraft.[13] Mirroring individual allies' nuclear alert levels, NATO currently is sticking to the concept that 'uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor' is the best deterrent and has made no public plans to change operational doctrine or weapon status.

**Recommendations:** As a first step, NATO's nuclear weapon states should lower the alert status of their arsenals, and the Alliance as a whole should state that there is no longer a requirement for maintaining such a status.

The United States, France and the United Kingdom should declare a no-first-use policy, and the Alliance publicly follow suit.

- *A diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies to minimize the risk that these weapons ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** Despite what NATO calls the "the radical changes in the security situation" and the analysis that the use of nuclear weapons is now "extremely remote," the Alliance remains committed to nuclear weapons as an "essential" asset.[14] In addition, it is unclear how the US policy of ambiguity toward the possible use of nuclear weapons to counter chemical or biological attacks fits into NATO's overall doctrine and strategy.

**Recommendations:** NATO as a first step should state that allied nuclear weapons are "weapons of last resort," as previously described in the 1990 London Declaration, to be used only in case of a nuclear attack. Allies further should reject the notion that nuclear weapons are essential to allied security – especially considering the recent agreement at the NPT 2000 Review Conference to "an unequivocal undertaking by the Nuclear Weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament."

Allies should publicly recommit themselves to the NPT's negative security assurances, stating that nuclear weapons will not be used against Non-Nuclear Weapon states.

- *The engagement as soon as appropriate of all the nuclear weapon States in the process leading to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO has made no direct contribution to this process thus far.

**Recommendations:** The Alliance should formally adopt the elimination of member's nuclear weapons as an eventual goal. It should also instruct senior committees to start work on a future Strategic Concept, to be discussed at the next meeting of heads of state and government in 2002, under which the possession, use or deployment of nuclear weapons is excluded. This would send a real message of interest and commitment to the NPT Preparatory Committee process, due to begin also in 2002.

*10. Arrangements by all Nuclear Weapon States to place, as soon as practicable, fissile material designated by each of them as no longer required for military purposes under IAEA or other relevant international verification and arrangements for the disposition of such material for peaceful purposes, to ensure that such material remains permanently outside of military programmes.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** The United Kingdom and France have made significant progress in this area, opening establishments to IAEA inspections and closing down production facilities respectively. The United States also has stopped production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

**Recommendations:** The NATO allies should upgrade their financial commitments to the IAEA, and NATO publicly should state its support of the organisation.

11. *Reaffirmation that the ultimate objective of the efforts of States in the disarmament process is general and complete disarmament under effective international control.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO has not stated this previously with specific regard to nuclear weapons, although conventional disarmament is mentioned in communiqués from the 1950s.

**Recommendations:** As NATO is not a state, it is under no legal obligation to comply with this point, but a combination of steps forward in many of the fields mentioned elsewhere in this paper would represent a significant help to national efforts.

12. *Regular reports, within the framework of the NPT strengthened review process, by all States parties on the implementation of Article VI and paragraph 4 (c) of the 1995 Decision on “Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament,” and recalling the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 8 July 1996.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** NATO has not made any move in this direction.

**Recommendations:** National parliaments and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly should put pressure on allies to comply with this.

13. *The further development of the verification capabilities that will be required to provide assurance of compliance with nuclear disarmament agreements for the achievement and maintenance of a nuclear-weapon-free world.*

**Current NATO policy/practice:** The United Kingdom has tasked its nuclear weapons establishment to conduct studies into future verification needs, and the United States possesses significant on-site inspection and verification expertise as a result of its experiences with the START and Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaties. Many allies also provided personnel to the UNSCOM operation in Iraq, during which much was learnt about the real difficulties of verification.

**Recommendations:** In its June 1990 Final Communiqué, the North Atlantic Council stated: “Recognising that the verification of arms control treaties is destined to become a long-term task for the Alliance, we have decided to establish a coordination mechanism for this purpose.”<sup>[15]</sup> NATO should resuscitate this initiative, and tie in verification, threat reduction and improving relations with Russia by commissioning joint projects with Russian nuclear weapons scientists to work on verification technologies for all weapons of mass destruction. Building on verification experience gained in the framework of the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty and other conventional weapons agreements, the newly established Weapons of Mass Destruction Centre within the International Secretariat should take a lead in commissioning this work. The Alliance will be in a better position to engage in talks on disarmament if it has already conducted substantive work on verification.

## Endnotes

[1] <http://www.NATO.INT/docu/pr/2000/p00-052e.htm>

[2] NATO, *The Future Tasks of the Alliance (“The Harmel Report”)* Brussels, 13-14 December 1967

[3] *The Alliance’s comprehensive concept of arms control and disarmament* Brussels, 29–30 May 1989

[4] BASIC’s 2000 NPT RevCon page

[5] <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/index.html>

[6] See ‘Questions of Command and Control’

[7] Statement, White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 6th 2000.

[8] Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Norway

[9] Correspondence from the FCO Security Policy Dept., 25th May 2000 to Dan Plesch.

[10] <http://www.NATO.INT/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>

[11] <http://www.NATO.INT/docu/pr/1997/p97-150e.htm>



[12] New York, 24 April 2000

[13] <http://www.NATO.INT/docu/pr/1997/p97-150e.htm>

[14] <http://www.NATO.INT/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>

[15] <http://www.NATO.INT/docu/comm/49-95/c900608a.htm>