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Experts Call NATO Strategic Concept 'Missed Opportunity to Reduce Role of Obsolete Tactical Nukes from Europe'

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(London/Berlin/Washington, D.C.) -- U.S. and European nuclear arms control and security experts criticized NATO's new "Strategic Concept" as a conservative, backward-looking policy, a missed opportunity to reduce the number and role of the 200 forward-deployed U.S. tactical nuclear bombs and engage Russia in a dialogue on removing all tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.

"In an astonishing demonstration of weakness, NATO Heads of State have failed to tackle the Cold War legacy of the deployment of U.S. nuclear gravity bombs in Europe, threatening the credibility of NATO members' claims to be interested in non-proliferation and global disarmament," said **Paul Ingram**, executive director of the British American Security Information Council in London.

Under NATO's long-standing "nuclear-sharing" arrangements, some 150-200 forward-deployed U.S. tactical nuclear bombs are based in five European NATO countries—Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Originally deployed in the 1950s to counter a possible Soviet land invasion, U.S. military officials acknowledge that tactical nuclear weapons no longer serve any practical military or deterrence function not already addressed by other U.S. military assets including U.S. conventional forces and the United States' 1,900 strategic nuclear weapons.

"The Strategic Concept fails to acknowledge that tactical nuclear bombs are not 'credible' weapons and are irrelevant for the defense of the alliance," said **Daryl G. Kimball**, director of the Arms Control Association in Washington.

Instead, the Strategic Concept says NATO aims to “ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defence planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces, and in command, control and consultation arrangements.”

The NATO document only hints that the forward deployed tactical nuclear weapons are not “essential guarantees” of Alliance security. The Strategic Concept says that “The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the *strategic* [emphasis added] nuclear forces of the Alliance...” The tactical nuclear weapons are not mentioned in this context.

“The failure of NATO leaders to shift its policy on ‘nuclear sharing’ could create rifts within the Alliance,” warned **Dr. Oliver Meier** of the Arms Control Association in Berlin. In February of this year, five NATO members, including three that host tactical nuclear bombs, called on the alliance to review the arrangements before NATO foreign ministers met in April to discuss the issue. “Investments in the status quo would be politically charged for governments in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, where strong Parliamentary and public pressure exists to have U.S. weapons withdrawn,” Meier added.

"NATO's decision to link reductions of U.S. tactical nuclear bombs in Europe to future Russian action on its tactical nuclear stockpile is a formula for inaction," noted ACA's Kimball. "On both sides, the reasons for maintaining these weapons are primarily internal and purely political," he said.

“Russia’s policy not to engage on tactical nuclear weapons until U.S. weapons are removed from Europe, means such a linkage would give Moscow leverage over NATO deliberations on the Alliance’s future nuclear posture,” Meier said.

“NATO has also failed to bring its nuclear declaratory policy in line with the policy adopted by the United States earlier this year,” Kimball said. The April 2010 U.S. *Nuclear Posture Review Report* states that the United States will “not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”

In contrast, the new NATO Strategic Concept outlines a more ambiguous role for nuclear weapons, including non-nuclear threats. It says: “We will ensure that NATO has the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against **any threat** [emphasis added] to the safety and security of our populations. Therefore, we will maintain an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces....”

" NATO should have recognized that these nuclear bombs are a security liability: a target for terrorists, blur the line between conventional and nuclear conflict, and are a drag on global nonproliferation efforts," said Kimball.

“We urge NATO members to take the opportunity in the new Strategic Posture review by further restricting the circumstances in which NATO would threaten opponents with a nuclear attack,” Ingram said.

“The agreed revision of Alliance nuclear posture must be comprehensive. All options should be on the table,” Meier said.

“NATO can still take tangible steps to strengthen European security by reducing dependence on nuclear weapons”, Ingram urged.

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The Arms Control Association (ACA) is an independent, membership-based organization dedicated to providing information and practical policy solutions to address the dangers posed by the world's most dangerous weapons. BASIC is a transatlantic security policy organization with a focus on nuclear non-proliferation and global disarmament.