

NATO's nuclear "obligations" — to whom?

*NATO's nuclear weapons policy is a
grave threat to humanity and the global environment*

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NATO is gearing up to formulate its new Strategic Concept. The current version, adopted in 1999, includes the use of nuclear weapons as an option. According to Article 46 of the 1999 Strategic Concept: "Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the alliance incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve the peace."

The Strategic Concept also includes the policy of first use of nuclear weapons, i.e. the self-appointed right to launch an unprovoked nuclear attack. When he was Defence Minister, Geoff Hoon announced in Parliament that it was U.K. policy to retain the first-use policy because of "obligations to NATO".

What of the United Kingdom's other obligations? There was no consideration in Mr. Hoon's announcement for obligations to humanity. The Trident nuclear-armed fleet, with the power to kill millions of innocent children, women and men, and to irreversibly damage the earth's environment, is 'integrated' into NATO.

NATO also has a policy of "nuclear sharing", by which U.S. nuclear weapons are deployed at NATO bases on the territories of non-nuclear member-states, including Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany Italy and Turkey. Nuclear sharing clearly breaches the principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to which the United Kingdom and all other NATO member-states are signatories.

Small steps in right direction

Since 1999, there has been a significant shift in opinion among many previous supporters of nuclear weapons. Among them are George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, former high-ranking U.S. officials who in 2008 issued a joint statement in support of nuclear disarmament.

Last month, the administration of President Barack Obama signed a bilateral agreement with Russia on nuclear disarmament (although it remains to be seen whether the U.S. Congress will ratify that agreement). The United States has also just published its latest *Nuclear Posture Review* which includes changes that place some restraints on the use of nuclear weapons.



U.K. Royal Navy

The U.K. fleet of nuclear-armed Trident submarines has the power to kill millions of human beings and to irreversibly damage the earth's environment.

Recently, after a decade of citizens' protests against the deployment of U.S. B-61 tactical nuclear weapons at NATO bases in Europe, the governments of five NATO member-states led by Germany declared that it is time for the USA/NATO weapons to go.

These are small but welcome steps toward greater safety for the planet.

The question now is whether NATO will make significant changes to its nuclear policy. Will it decide to work for a nuclear free world, and to whom will it turn for advice on the nuclear policy of the new Strategic Concept?

One source of advice is the Atlantic Council which describes its role as promoting "U.S. leadership and engagement in international affairs". The Council's Strategic Advisors Group (SAG) — which acknowledges "generous financial support from the Scowcroft Group, EADS North America and Airbus" — recently published what it calls an issue brief entitled "NATO's Nuclear Policy in 2010: Issues and Options".

The brief is clearly an attempt by corporations involved primarily in arms manufacturing and extractive industries to write NATO nuclear policy. Co-chairmen of the Strategic Advisors Group are U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel and Airbus CEO Thomas Enders. Other members include retired U.S. general Brent Scowcroft, President and founder of the Scowcroft Group, and Chair of the Atlantic Council International Advisory Board, plus representatives of Thales, EADS (European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company),

Dornier Aircraft, and the Rand Corporation, a think tank associated with the U.S. defence establishment. There is one member from the European Parliament, but none from any European national parliament or from any other walk of life.

Cold War thinking

It comes as no surprise that the policy recommended in the brief differs little from that of the Cold War, nor that it fails to reflect any of the new thinking that has developed during the past decade. The SAG document asserts that "tough issues are facing the Atlantic community and NATO". That much is true, at least. But its recommendations display little or no insight into the real dangers of international relations that need to be faced.

The document reiterates that NATO must retain nuclear weapons in order to deter nuclear attack; and it rejects the abandonment of the first-use doctrine, because that would be "politically divisive and militarily inappropriate". The brief further says that nuclear weapons must be maintained for "other interests vital to [the member-states'] security". The "other interests" presumably include the energy and mining industries.

It appears that NATO's advisors at the Atlantic Council realise that there is growing opposition to the alliance's nuclear installations in Europe. How do they tackle that problem? By recommending that the new Strategic Concept not refer to nuclear sharing, because any such reference could ignite a "deeply divisive debate on a marginal issue". They recommend, instead, "a new and more visible system for committing more survivable nuclear forces to NATO missions". What can that possibly mean? What or who can be "survivable" in this context?

The SAG document concedes that problems could be posed by politicians and citizens who believe that nuclear weapons are a "relic of the Cold War" and are "environmentally dangerous, and incompatible with NPT obligations". But if one looks at the SAG recommendations, it would seem that they merely recite the main anti-nuclear arguments in order to ensure that NATO policy-makers make the best possible case for maintaining a pro-nuclear policy.

Deaf to enlightened opinion

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the current Secretary-General of NATO, has clearly stated his position on nuclear policy; and it appears that he has listened more attentively to SAG than to those who advocate nuclear disarmament. Earlier this year in Poland he said:

"For our deterrence to remain credible, I firmly believe it must continue to be based on a mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities. And our Strategic Concept should affirm that... We must develop an effective missile defence. In the coming years, we will probably face many more countries— and possibly even some non-state actors — armed with long-range and nuclear capabilities. Therefore, I believe that NATO's deterrent posture should include missile defence."

At the meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Estonia in late April of this year, the Rasmussen declared that, "In a world where nuclear weapons actually exist, NATO needs a credible, effective and safely managed deterrent. He consistently states that he wants NATO to support the missile defence system along the Russian border proposed by the United States, and that it be linked with a NATO policy that includes nuclear weapons. Apparently, this will all contribute to "keeping NATO strong".

"Missile defence is no replacement for an effective deterrent," said Rasmussen. "But it can complement it. Because there are states, or other actors, who might not be rational enough to be deterred by our nuclear weapons."

Bad examples

In no way does the NATO Secretary-General indicate that he is listening to the political leaders, distinguished writers, senior military officers and the voices of civil society who are saying that the safest path for the world is one that leads to a global ban on nuclear weapons. In no way does he address the biggest ongoing danger to world peace — the nuclear-weapon states whose message continues to be, "Do as I say, not as I do".

If the nuclear-weapon states and NATO insist that nuclear weapons are essential for security, then other nation-states will inevitably seek to develop nuclear capabilities. Furthermore, it is meaningless for the nuclear-weapon states and NATO to keep pointing to the dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation if they, themselves, continue to develop the capabilities of their own nuclear arsenals.

This is true of the United Kingdom, where the two major political parties — despite opposition from a large majority of the general public — are both in favour of renewing the Trident nuclear submarine fleet which is integrated with NATO.

Above all, the vision of a nuclear-free world which President Obama evoked in his speech in Prague last year has been completely ignored by the NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen.

Dare we hope that other voices within NATO, of individuals who genuinely seek peace and stability in the world, will influence the formation of the new Strategic Concept?

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Additional sources

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
<http://www.cnduk.org>

NATO's Strategic Concept (1999)
www.nato.int/cps/en/nato_live/official_texts_27433.htm

"Nuclear Weapons and... U.S.-NATO Military Strategy In Europe"
Rick Rozoff, Stop NATO, 2010-04-23
<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/04/23/nuclear-weapons-and-interceptor-missiles-twin-pillars-of-u-s-nato-military-strategy-in-europe>

Svenska Läkare mot Kärnvapen
<http://slmk.org>

Note: At this time, it is not known when the new Strategic Concept will be announced. Information on that and related matters is available on NATO's website: <http://www.nato.int>

www.nnn.se/nordic/americult/nato/usa-nato.htm