

Middle Powers Initiative

Brief on NATO Nuclear Policy

September 2003

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Middle Powers Initiative (MPI) urges the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its member States to bring their security policies into harmony with specific security enhancing commitments made under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), particularly those set forth in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference. The Final Document, unanimously adopted by all NPT States parties, spells out a number of strong commitments aimed at reducing threats posed by nuclear weapons. Commitments related to fulfilling legally binding disarmament pledges contained in Article VI of the NPT include:

- 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;
- 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;
- 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.¹

1.2 Despite these commitments, NATO's security policy continues to stress the importance of nuclear weapons and deterrence, thus challenging the word and spirit of the NPT and undermining the WMD nonproliferation and disarmament regime. In particular, the deployment of approximately 180 U.S. tactical nuclear warheads in NATO represents a policy that is contrary to fulfilling the above listed commitments. The deployment of these tactical nuclear weapons is an anachronistic holdover from Cold War era policy making that sends the wrong message to the rest of the world, thwarts progress in working to reduce and eliminate the 4,000 tactical nuclear weapons possessed by Russia, diminishes collective security by subverting the force of the NPT and stimulating nuclear proliferation in areas of concern, and deeply concerns numerous non-nuclear weapon States not in NATO.

2. NATO/NPT COHERENCE

2.1 During the height of the Cold War, NATO adopted a security policy that relied *inter alia* on the threat of first-use of tactical nuclear weapons against a Soviet conventional attack. It was on the basis of this policy that six non-nuclear European NATO member States (Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey) agreed to station hundreds of U.S. nuclear warheads on their territories.

2.2 The Cold War ended more than a decade ago. The Soviet Union no longer exists. Its successor, the Russian Federation, has become a close NATO partner. A Russian attack on NATO today is unimaginable. Yet, while the rationale for the use of tactical nuclear weapons by NATO has disappeared, NATO continues to deploy these weapons. Moreover, their continued deployment makes progress in negotiating the elimination of the more than 4,000 Russian tactical nuclear weapons all the more difficult.

2.3 As NATO and Russia are working to achieve “a common and comprehensive security based on the allegiance to shared values, commitments and norms of behavior,”² deploying tactical nuclear weapons that pose an unnecessary threat is damaging. Worse, these continued deployments stimulate the quest for new military rationales.

2.4 To many, the current situation appears to be weapons systems in search of a policy. A morally impeccable, more practicable, and overall more effective security policy has already been spelled out within the framework of the NPT: diminish the role of nuclear weapons by eliminating their deployment.

2.5 Their continued deployment is an implicit assertion of the perceived political value of nuclear weapons in an unstable world. Lacking a valid military rationale, it has become apparent that NATO clings to tactical nuclear weapons primarily for their perceived political value – that is, greater bargaining power on the world political stage, and strengthened transatlantic ties. The maintenance of a security policy based on nuclear weapons for the purpose of achieving greater political power, however, is extremely dangerous, since it inevitably invites others to follow suit.

2.6 Worse, such a policy does not only stimulate proliferation, it also undermines the moral credibility of NATO and its member States when promoting WMD nonproliferation worldwide. As far as stronger transatlantic ties are concerned, nuclear weapons historically have been neither necessary to build a strong Alliance, nor have they helped to prevent the occurrence of political divisions within the Alliance.

2.7 Moreover, the deployment of these weapons is an impediment to the much needed progress in nuclear disarmament that is the precondition for a sustainable NPT regime. The only policy that credibly works to curb nuclear weapons proliferation is a policy in support of the commitments set forth at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. These commitments call for the diminishing of the political and military value of nuclear weapons as part of an unequivocal undertaking of all parties to the NPT to obtain their total elimination.

2.8 It is well known that the NATO deployments remain a concern to numerous non-nuclear weapon States that have forsworn nuclear weapons based on the disarmament commitments made under the NPT. The first two Articles of the NPT, on their face, prohibit the sharing of nuclear weapons.³ NATO deployments are rationalized based on arcane legal arguments that prevent progress in strengthening the coherence and credibility of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. These arguments exaggerate rather than reduce the salience of nuclear weapons as a currency of power. Emphasizing the perceived value of nuclear weapons is unwise and perilous, particularly in today’s new strategic environment.

2.9 All NATO member States are parties to the NPT. Maintenance of tactical nuclear weapons in NATO non-nuclear weapon States in Europe is inconsistent with the commitments

under the NPT to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security policies as part of fulfilling legally binding disarmament pledges. Practical steps toward the global elimination of nuclear weapons are held back by this anachronistic policy that flies in the face of the forward-oriented, much needed promise of the NPT.

2.10 Additionally, the practical, legal and moral requirement of reducing the likelihood that *the* most hazardous weapon of mass destruction might ever be used is thwarted by NATO deployments. The resulting profound contradictions of current NATO policies regarding nuclear deployments severely undermine the political capacity of NATO and each of its member States to effectively engage in international initiatives that would generate greater security. On the one hand, it puts serious, potentially insurmountable obstacles on the path toward a common European security and defense policy. On the other, it strains transatlantic relationships at a time when undivided leadership and international cooperation have become vital to effectively address a broad range of global security threats.

3. POSITION OF THE NEW AGENDA COALITION

3.1 For these reasons, MPI strongly endorses the positions advocated by the New Agenda Coalition to achieve progress toward the reduction and elimination of non-strategic or tactical nuclear weapons. The New Agenda Coalition, consisting of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and Sweden, recently affirmed that:

The New Agenda considers that the reduction and elimination of non-strategic or tactical nuclear weapons in a transparent and irreversible manner constitutes an *essential* element in a framework of a complete nuclear disarmament process. The possession of non-strategic and tactical nuclear weapons poses real risks, which, we believe, require our collective attention for a number of reasons. For instance, the comparative portability of non-strategic weapons and the ability to station them in close proximity to areas of conflict makes them more susceptible to use in combat or theft.⁴

3.2 Further, the global concerns relating to the dangers tactical nuclear weapons pose are set forth in a rigorous Working Paper titled “Reductions of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons,” submitted by Austria, Mexico and Sweden at the 2003 NPT PrepCom.⁵ The Paper warns of the dangerous proposition that – because their yield is lower than the yield of strategic nuclear weapons – tactical weapons can be considered “usable” or “justified.” The Working Paper also warns that some countries could consider tactical nuclear weapons a viable tool to counter superior conventional forces, “especially if resources are lacking to advance and modernize conventional weapons systems.” These perceptions underscore the utmost importance of addressing the temptation to acquire these weapons. MPI strongly urges serious consideration of the policies set forth in the Working Paper.

3.3 In October 2003, the NAC submits to the UN General Assembly two resolutions, entitled “Towards a nuclear weapon free world: a new agenda” and “Reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons.” These resolutions stress that

- the continuous irreversible reduction of all nuclear weapons – both strategic and non-strategic – is a fundamental pre-requisite for preventing the further spread of these horrific devices;
- the sole guarantee against the use of any weapon of mass destruction anywhere, including nuclear weapons, is their total elimination and the assurance that they will never be used or produced again;
- emerging approaches to broadening the role of nuclear weapons as part of security strategies, including rationalizations for the use of, and the development of new types of nuclear weapons, are threatening rather than increasing international peace and stability;
- all parties to the NPT must fully comply with their obligations and commitments made under the Treaty, and reaffirm, in word and deed, the Treaty's central role in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
- the reduction and elimination of non-strategic nuclear weapons should be included as an integral part of the nuclear arms reduction and disarmament process, and that such reductions should be carried out in a transparent, verifiable and irreversible manner.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The larger issue of how to move beyond deterrence to disarmament remains occluded by the failure to eliminate a deployment that has no utility. The Middle Powers Initiative urges NATO and its member States to stand down and eliminate all tactical nuclear weapon deployments in Europe.

4.2 MPI further encourages all NATO member States to support the UN General Assembly resolutions submitted by the New Agenda Coalition. It is in the supreme security interest of every country to take forceful and clear steps to ensure that the use of tactical nuclear weapons remains a taboo, that their political attractiveness be decried, and that their physical elimination be achieved. NATO member States can and must assume an active leadership role toward achieving these vital goals.

ENDNOTES

¹ 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Final Document, Vol. I, Part I, Section *Article VI and eighth to twelfth preambular paragraphs*, paras. 15.6 and 15.9 (UN Doc. NPT/CONF.2000/28).

² Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Paris, May 27, 1997.

³ The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty states in relevant part:

Article I

Each nuclear-weapon 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; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any non-nuclear-weapon State to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons or explosive devices.

Article II

Each non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to receive the transfer from any transferor whatsoever of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

⁴ Para. 11, New Agenda Coalition Statement of April 28 to the 2003 NPT PrepCom, delivered by H.E. Ms. Marian Hobbs, Minister of New Zealand for Disarmament and Arms Control. *See also* New Agenda Coalition Paper submitted by Egypt on behalf of the New Agenda States at the 2002 PrepCom, paragraph 30 (UN Doc. NPT/CONF.2005/PC.I/9, April 5, 2002). Emphasis added.

⁵ UN Doc. NPT/CONF.2005/PC.II/WP.13.