



FORWARD DEPLOYED NUCLEAR WEAPONS:

A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

The end of the Cold War and the asymmetric geopolitics of the new post-9/11 environment have dramatically upset the strategic balance and called into question the role of military nuclear power in particular. The future of nuclear deterrence is once again trapped in the spotlight, and rightly so. The threat of proliferation, the issue of strategic surprise, or the resurgence of international tensions--as highlighted by the Ukrainian crisis--send divergent and dangerously ambiguous signals. Increasingly, in recent years, thought has been given to abandoning deterrence for doctrinal, ideological, strategic, and ethical, as well as budgetary, reasons.

Since the end of the Cold War and the enlargement of NATO, the B61 Tactical Nuclear Weapon (TNW) is militarily irrelevant. Most dual-capable aircraft cannot even reach targets outside NATO's territory. How can NATO "deter" with weapons that have no military use? These Cold War relics are generally agreed to serve no military purpose, and there were hopes that the Obama administration would remove them as a unilateral gesture, with the aim of inviting reciprocal action from Russia. So far this has not happened, and a strange enactment of the perilous Cold War nuclear stand-off has been allowed to continue.

Eight European nations have nuclear weapons on their territory: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom. With the exception of Russia, all of these States are NATO members, and share responsibility for the continued forward deployment of USA tactical (non-strategic) nuclear weapons. Of the five States hosting these forward deployed nuclear bombs, four are also members of the European Union; a March 2010 resolution by the European parliament calls these weapons an "anachronism". Meanwhile, EU statements for Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conferences tend to focus on the nuclear disarmament steps that *other* countries should take.

The 5 European "host nations" are in the midst of selecting a new generation of

fighter jets to replace current F16 or Tornado aircraft. To perform the nuclear task, the new aircraft would have to be dual capable, able to undertake both nuclear and conventional missions.

NATO States currently hosting nuclear weapons have a key role to play in broader disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. The continued stationing of nuclear weapons in non-nuclear weapons States, as well as the training of their military to use these weapons is in violation of Articles 1 and 2 of the NPT, which prohibit any transfer of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear weapon States. The USA is the only country continuing the practice of forward deployment in Europe. There is no legitimate justification for the continued deployment of these weapons. They must be repatriated, so that Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey can be in unquestioned compliance with all of their treaty obligations.

The obsolescent doctrine is that tactical or non-strategic nuclear weapons are "small" nuclear weapons regarded to be more "useable" in combat. During the Cold War, the USA stationed hundreds of these tactical nukes in Europe under the NATO nuclear umbrella sharing policy. These "small" bombs, in their various models and calibrations, have an explosive yield that ranges from 0.3 to 170 kilotons; to translate, at the high end of the range we are talking about a destructive power that is 14 times that of the Hiroshima bomb.

The United States now has approximately 1,100 non-strategic nuclear weapons, with a few hundred deployed adjacent to aircraft in Europe, and the remaining stored in the United States. Estimates vary, but experts believe Russia still has between 2,000 and 6,000 warheads for non-strategic nuclear weapons in its arsenal. These weapons are outside of the agreements between the United States and Russia on the limits for nuclear weapons inventory, or reduction and verification measures.

American and NATO aircraft regularly conduct nuclear strike exercises, in which they practice loading and delivering the weapons. These nuclear exercises include practicing "generation" of aircraft, during which the aircraft simulate taking off in strike formation accompanied by air-defence aircraft, and conduct a simulated strike at a bombing range.

Fortunately, there is discussion within NATO about changing the role of nuclear weapons in its security defence doctrines and strategy. A majority of NATO countries do not explicitly want to keep USA nuclear weapons in Europe.

Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Poland have proposed a series of steps that NATO and Russia should take to increase transparency of USA and Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons. Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Iceland, Luxemburg, and Slovenia also supported the proposal.

Two obstacles stand in the way of removing the TNW. First, there is an East-West split in NATO. A number of Western European NATO countries see little use for continued deployment, while some Central and Eastern European countries regard the physical presence of USA TNW as a hedge against potential future Russian aggression.

The second obstacle is the assumption that the USA TNW can be used as bargaining chip in bilateral negotiations with Russia, with the aim to commit Russia to reductions of its own much larger stockpile of TNW. However, since Russia has at least 10 times more TNW, it is difficult to see how negotiations could proceed without the USA and NATO having to put other items on the bargaining table, such as missile defence and conventional weapons, which they are extremely unlikely to do.

Nuclear Disarmament for Development

An urgent aspect is the human and financial cost of maintaining – and even renovating – the U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons. The USA is poised to spend \$11.6 billion to upgrade a handful of nuclear bombs. The Pentagon wants to upgrade the TNW in Europe, making them more accurate and more usable. There is growing opinion among political leaders and the general public – not least in Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium – to get rid of these weapons. A small minority of NATO allies cling to the bombs as a political symbol of America's commitment to the security in Europe.

These maintenance and upgrade funds would be better used for the impoverished of the world, including those within the USA itself. The continued investment in weapons of mass destruction is not only intrinsically immoral, but also an immense violation of the dignity of those who are forced to live on the margins of our world. On behalf of the poor and excluded in society, all plans to refurbish nuclear arsenals, and policies that undermine efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the earth, should be abandoned.

The doctrine of nuclear deterrence is itself the chief obstacle to meaningful progress on nuclear disarmament. It is what drives the modernization of existing

stocks of nuclear systems, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament. All nuclear-armed States are in the process of modernizing their arsenals. Even debating modernization undermines the credibility of their commitment to the NPT, and especially the disarmament obligations under Article VI. This was explicitly recognized by a group of non-nuclear weapons States in a working paper presented to the 2009 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting, in which they stated that “the development of new types of nuclear weapons... and the lack of significant progress in diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in security policies undermine disarmament commitments and work counter to the letter and spirit, of the Treaty.” The nuclear weapons States are currently allocating more than one trillion dollars for modernization expenses over the next decade; how can they be credible when they call for strengthening of the non-proliferation aims of the NPT?

Let us consider, in the light of these intentions that nearly 1.5 billion people in developing countries live in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.25 a day. Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes. In the United States itself, 14.5 percent of households struggle to put food on the table.

It must be clearly understood: Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) have no conceivable military function anymore. Rather, the debate about whether or not the TNW can be withdrawn is a political one. There is growing public opinion in Europe urging the USA not to renew its tactical weapons capacity. Let’s take the Belgian case:

For 50 years there have been nuclear weapons sited in Belgium, at the 1100-acre Kleine Brogel Air Base, to the extreme northeast of the country, near the Dutch border. These weapons are useless, expensive and dangerous. The majority of the Belgian population wants them out. The government committed itself to work on a world without nuclear weapons, but tangible progress remains is absent.

Public support for removal is broad and deep. Over a hundred key leaders from the academic, cultural, political, trade union and socio-cultural sectors support the demand for the removal of nuclear weapons from Kleine Brogel. Along with the group of former Belgian prime ministers and the former NATO Secretary

General, they are concerned about the lack of policies that might lead to a world without nuclear weapons.

In its governmental agreement of 2011 the Belgian leadership promised “to promote and support international initiatives for disarmament, including nuclear disarmament”. To this day this intention has not been fulfilled. In Belgium, the new government should begin local concrete measures, starting with the removal of the estimated 22 American B-61 bombs (tactical nuclear weapons) and their maintenance unit that are currently stationed in Kleine Brogel.

In the light of these circumstances, Pax Christi International¹ recommends the following:

1. That European States recognize their non-proliferation responsibilities and take transparent, irreversible, and verifiable action to remove nuclear weapons from the continent. Where the EU is unable to speak with one voice, individual member States should express their view and uphold their non-proliferation obligations by insisting that USA/NATO nuclear weapons be removed from European soil.
2. That NATO nuclear host countries seize the opportunity of the NPT Preparatory Committee meeting to announce their intention to comply with all of their NPT obligations through efforts to terminate the NATO practice of nuclear “burden-sharing.”
3. That nuclear-armed States declare a commitment to not modernizing their weapons and delivery systems, and that these declarations should be supported and encouraged by States involved in nuclear sharing or umbrella agreements.

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¹ www.paxchristi.net