

# LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

## ***NATO – background***

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military alliance established by the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949. Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, the organization constitutes a system of collective defence whereby its member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party. The mutual enemy at the time of establishment was the communist Soviet Union and its allies, which in 1955 established a similar military alliance: the Warsaw Pact. Today, NATO has 26 Member States.

The Parties of NATO agreed that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all. Consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence will assist the Party or Parties being attacked, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon, NATO stated that the attack was not only an attack against the US but against all NATO states. Since then, NATO has contributed to the US's so called war on terrorism.

On 28 February 1994, NATO took its first military action, shooting down four Bosnian Serb aircraft violating a UN-mandated no-fly zone over central Bosnia and Herzegovina. A NATO bombing campaign began in August 1995, against the Army of Republika Srpska, after the Srebrenica massacre. On 24 March 1999, NATO saw its first broad-scale military engagement in the Kosovo War, where it waged an 11-week bombing campaign, which NATO called Operation Allied Force, against what was then the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The damage on Serbian infrastructure was extensive. A formal declaration of war never took place. Yugoslavia protested against the offensive and claimed it was “a war of aggression”, violating the UN Charter. A NATO led peace force under UN mandate has operated in Kosovo since the end of the war in 1999. In 2003, NATO began its first ever mission outside Europe when establishing the ISAF force in Afghanistan.

## ***NATO nuclear policy***

Nuclear weapons have been an important part of NATO's common defence policy since the founding of the organisation. According to the NATO defence doctrine from 1949, part of NATO's defence policy includes to “Insure the ability to carry out strategic bombing including the prompt delivery of the atomic bomb”. According to the doctrine, the US holds the main responsibility in making sure this is carried out.<sup>1</sup>



NATO describes its Nuclear Sharing policy in very positive terms. Policy states that NATO nuclear weapons in Europe contribute to peace and stability. Nuclear weapons deter attacks against NATO Member States in a way conventional forces cannot. “By promoting European stability, helping to discourage threats relating to the use of weapons of mass destruction, and contributing to deterrence against such use, NATO’s nuclear posture serves the interests not only of the Allies, but also of its Partner countries and of Europe as a whole”<sup>2</sup>, says the NATO Handbook on nuclear policy of 2002.

Many, states and organisations alike, view the NATO nuclear policy differently. Instead of creating peace and stability, nuclear weapons in Europe increase international tensions. The report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (2006) points to the problem that NATO nuclear weapons in Europe block

negotiations on further reductions of Russian nuclear arsenals, as Russia obviously consider US nuclear weapon so close to its own territory as a threat.<sup>3</sup>

Discussions and decisions on the NATO nuclear policy are done in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). The NPG provides a forum in which member countries of the Alliance can participate in the development of the Alliance’s nuclear policy and in decisions on NATO’s nuclear posture, irrespective of whether or not they themselves maintain nuclear weapons. Decisions are taken by consensus within the NPG, as is the case for all NATO committees.<sup>4</sup>

After the Cold War, NATO presented a new direction in its defence policy, to respond to new security threats. Regarding its nuclear policy, NATO decreased its reliance on nuclear weapons to match the new security situation. The Alliance’s strategy is still about preventing war, but is no longer dominated by the risk of war escalation into nuclear war. As NATO puts it: “NATO’s nuclear forces continue to play an essential role in war prevention, but their role is now more fundamentally political, and they are no longer directed towards a specific threat”<sup>5</sup>.

In 1999 NATO reiterated its strategic policy on Nuclear Sharing adopted by member states. This makes clear US nuclear weapons under the NATO Nuclear Sharing Programme will remain deployed in Europe for an indefinite period<sup>6</sup>.

In January 2008, a radical manifesto for a new NATO was presented: *Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World*. Behind this suggestion were five prominent senior military commanders and strategists: John Shalikashvili, Klaus Naumann, Lord Inge, Henk van den Breemen och Jacques Lanxade. The western world must be ready to use nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive attack to prevent the imminent threat of nuclear weapons proliferation, claim the authors of the manifesto.

“Regrettably, nuclear weapons – and with them the option of first use – are indispensable, since there is simply no realistic prospect of a nuclear-free world”, says the manifesto.<sup>7</sup>

The report is more than 150 pages, painting a truly frightening scenario of the threats and challenges facing the Western world. Among the greatest threats presented are international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, religious fanaticism, climate change and conflicts over limited natural resources, as well as a weakening of international bodies such as the UN and the EU. To conquer these threats, the authors call for a review of NATO. Among suggested changes is for NATO to make decisions by majority vote and not consensus; where not all states are part of all decisions made and where military interventions can be established without a UN Security Council mandate.<sup>8</sup>

To many, this kind of NATO would be a nightmare. Decision making by majority rather than consensus would mean an independent state could no longer block decisions, e.g. an armed attack or a military mission in another country. A NATO where not all states are involved in all decision making, but only in decisions affecting the state itself, is also dangerous. According to the authors, only states planning to join an international intervention can be involved in making decisions regarding the same. This gives states with large military and financial capability the possibility to act over other states' heads. Let's take an example: if the US and the UK wish to invade Iraq and are prepared to contribute all the money and armed forces needed, no other NATO states would have the right to stop this. The suggestion of allowing military intervention without a UN mandate weakens the status of the world organisation and undermines international democracy.

#### ***After the NATO summit in Bucharest 2008***

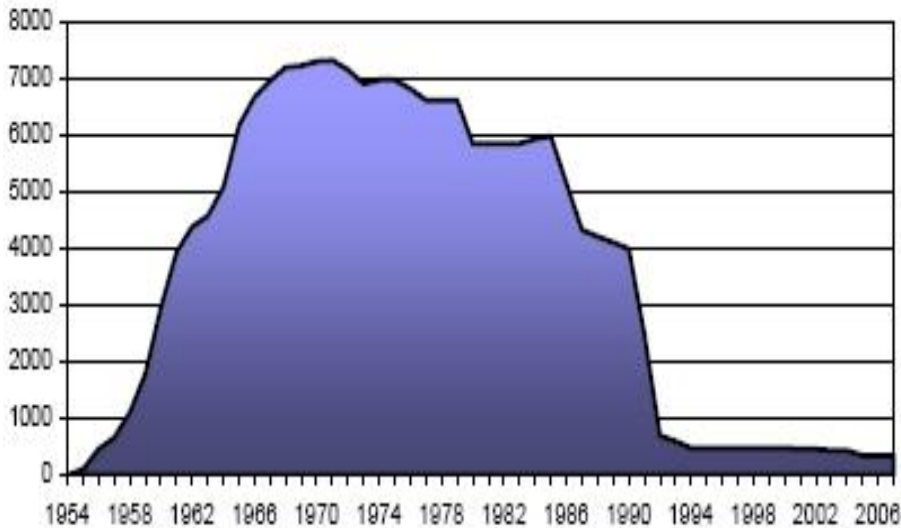
Between 2-4 April 2008, state officials and government representatives of NATO states and partners met for a summit in Bucharest, the capital of new NATO member, Romania. On the agenda were: issues regarding the expansion of NATO and possible new member states; the NATO intervention in Afghanistan; and a revision of NATO to meet current international security challenges. At the end of the summit, a Communiqué<sup>9</sup> was issued to summarise discussions and decisions made.

The paragraphs within the Communiqué concerning nuclear weapons, arms control and disarmament are interesting and unusual for NATO. The statement is notable, as it does not reiterate the Alliance's usual position that nuclear weapons are an essential element of Alliance security and an indispensable part of the trans-Atlantic link. Germany and Norway have been pressing the Alliance for a comprehensive review of arms control policy, and it appears that this continues. It is notable while the Alliance reports its and its members' achievements in reducing their nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War, there is no statement of future action. NATO has, in the past, actively used arms control and nuclear reductions to enhance its security and that of the whole of Europe. In this context, it is disappointing not to see active support for vital non-proliferation and disarmament measures like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Fissile Material Cut-Off treaty. It is to be hoped that with the departure of President Bush, NATO and US policy can become more forward leaning in this area.<sup>10</sup>

#### ***NATO nuclear weapons in Europe***

NATO's nuclear policy is based on the concept of Nuclear Sharing – that is, placing nuclear weapons on the territory of non-nuclear weapon states. Only three of the five official nuclear weapon states according to the NPT are NATO Member States: the US, the UK and France. Yet, there are NATO nuclear weapons deployed in several countries that are signatories to the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states: Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany and Turkey.

The first US nuclear weapons in Europe were deployed in the UK in 1954. In March 1957, NATO Commander-in-Chief confirmed the deployment of NATO nuclear weapons in Germany as well. The nuclear sharing idea is based on placing US nuclear weapons and launching systems in European NATO allies. In time of peace, the nuclear weapons would be under US control, but in the event of war, the US President could issue an order of use of the nuclear weapons and give the hosting state control over the weapons.



*Table: Number of US nuclear weapons in Europe under the NATO Nuclear Sharing Programme between 1954-2006.*

*Source: Federation of American Scientists*

The approximately 350 nuclear weapons currently deployed is only a fraction of the force the United States deployed in Europe during the Cold War. That level reached a peak of 7,300 weapons in 1971. The number dropped to 4,000 by the end of the Cold War in 1990, plunged to 700 in 1992, and levelled off at approximately 480 weapons (all bombs) in 1994. This ended the dramatic period of nuclear disarmament initiatives, which has since been replaced by a period of relative stability with slow and gradual reductions. Twenty bombs were withdrawn in 2001 after Greece pulled out of the NATO nuclear strike mission, and another 20 were withdrawn in 2003 when Germany closed Memmingen Air Base.<sup>11</sup> There are some uncertainty surrounding 130 nuclear weapons removed in 2005 from the US air base in German Ramstein, but indications are that the US quietly have withdrawn these 130 nuclear weapons under the NATO nuclear sharing.<sup>12</sup> With this reduction included, the number of US nuclear weapons in Europe today is estimated to be 350.<sup>13</sup>

Although NATO nuclear weapons in Europe have been remarkably reduced, the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) reiterated as late as July 2007 that NATO places great importance in the continued deployment of US nuclear weapons in Europe. The ability of nuclear weapons to keep the peace and prevent war is still referenced. The NPG does not identify a particular enemy that the nuclear weapons protect Europe from, but clarifies that “we continue to place great value on the nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO, which provide an essential political and military link between the European and North American members of the Alliance”.<sup>14</sup>

The governments of NATO countries have a direct role in shaping NATO policy and can insist that these weapons be removed from their territory. The US has taken their weapons home several times before: Canada, Greece, Denmark (Greenland) and Iceland are all now free of US nuclear bombs.<sup>15</sup> Lately, the demands on withdrawing the US nuclear weapons from Europe have increased. On 15 July 2005, the House of Representatives in Belgium adopted a resolution calling for a withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Belgium and the rest of Europe.<sup>16</sup> In May the same year, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer and Minister of Defense Peter Struck raised the same issue. Their statement said it was high time that US nuclear weapons disappear from Europe, and was met positively. But the two initiators soon toned down their earlier statement. The issue of NATO nuclear weapons is politically sensitive, and many important political issues are embedded in maintaining good relations between Germany and the US.<sup>17</sup>

While 350 nuclear weapons might not sound that much, considering the enormous arsenals kept by the nuclear weapon states during the Cold War, they constitute a significant force. It roughly corresponds to the nuclear arsenal of France, is larger than China's arsenal as well as the three de-facto nuclear weapon states' (India, Israel and Pakistan) combined. Each of these nuclear weapons has a destructive capacity of up to ten times that of the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima, and has a combined power capable of wiping Europe off the map.

### ***NATO nuclear weapons and the NPT***

There are ample reasons to question the status of Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany and Turkey as non-nuclear weapon states. Above all, there is reason to question whether the NATO Nuclear Sharing really is in line with the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

When NPT negotiations began in the 1960's, the NATO nuclear sharing policy was threatened. Was it really legal? The NPT that entered into force 1970 established internationally binding legal norms for arms control and disarmament. All NATO Member States are also signatories to the NPT, and official NATO documents refer to the responsibility of Member States under the NPT.

Article I of the NPT prohibits nuclear weapon states transferring control of nuclear weapons to any recipient whatsoever. Article II prohibits non-nuclear weapon states from receiving nuclear weapons.<sup>18</sup>

Deploying US nuclear weapons in European non-nuclear weapon states should be considered a violation of the prohibition of placing nuclear weapons under the control of any other recipient. NATO argues its nuclear policy is in line with the NPT. During the ratification process of the NPT in the US, Secretary of State Dean Rusk explained to the Senate that the NPT "does not deal with arrangements for deployment of nuclear weapons within Allied territory, as these do not involve any transfer of nuclear weapons or control over them unless and until a decision were made to go to war, at which time the treaty would no longer be controlling".<sup>19</sup> A 1994 NATO fact sheet presents another argument: the NATO nuclear arrangement is in line with the NPT. The nuclear sharing arrangement was already in place when the NPT was negotiated, and NATO put its cards on the table throughout the negotiating process. No delegation party to the negotiations opposed this.<sup>20</sup> Thus, claims NATO, nuclear sharing is legal and in line with the NPT.

The 1985 Review Conference of the NPT made a unanimous but almost unnoticed decision that the Treaty should be implemented "under any circumstances", i.e. also in wartime.<sup>21</sup> This decision was reiterated in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference.<sup>22</sup> Thus, there is no doubt the

NATO policy of transferring control of US nuclear weapons to European non-nuclear weapon states in the event of war is an act in violation of the NPT.

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  - 3 Weapons of Terror. Freeing the World from Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms. 2006 s. 97.
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  - 19 <http://www.basicint.org/nuclear/NATO/PENNnote2-nuclearsharing-1997.htm>
  - 20 <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/issues/NATO-nuclear-policies/index.htm>
  - 21 Document NPT/CONF.III/64/I, Annex I.
  - 22 Document NPT/CONF.2000/28 part I of article I and II and the preambular paragraphs I to III.

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