

Statement on NATO's Nuclear Weapons Policies

US President Barack Obama says that the United States and Russia should lead the way in preventing nuclear proliferation by restarting negotiations to cut their atomic arsenals. Obama said at his first news conference that he has told Russian President Dmitry Medvedev "it is important for us to restart the conversations about how we can start reducing our nuclear arsenals." With such a push, he said "we then have the standing to go to other countries and start stitching back together the non-proliferation treaties that, frankly, have been weakened over the last several years."

As representatives of the Canadian Pugwash Group (www.pugwashgroup.ca/), the Canadian affiliate of the International Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (www.pugwash.org/) we applaud President Obama's new disarmament initiatives and we urge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also reconsider its approach to international diplomacy and disarmament. Efforts to expand the NATO alliance to include other former Soviet republics and bring a European-based missile defense system into existence are further polarizing an already-strained relationship with Russia. This could create renewed "East versus West" tensions, eating into the unprecedented reservoir of hope that has uniquely characterized the beginning of the Obama presidency. President Obama has pledged to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, particularly the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NATO alliance's reluctance to jettison its doctrine of nuclear dependence could easily undermine his efforts.

Accordingly, we applaud Hillary Clinton's confirmation hearing on January 13 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in which she said the Obama administration would take the lead in "working with others to reduce current nuclear stockpiles and prevent the development and use of dangerous new weaponry." She pledged to work with Russia to take missiles in both countries "off hair-trigger alert." Clinton also promised the United States would work to shore up the nonproliferation regime, seek Senate ratification of the test ban treaty, and revive negotiations for a treaty banning fissile material production.

As we move toward the next important NPT Review Conference in 2010, we urge the NATO allies to consider such a substantive shift towards nuclear disarmament. In particular, we call upon the allied governments in NATO to reject current nuclear doctrine and nuclear planning in favor of credible movement toward honoring Article VI of the NPT Treaty.

To counteract the negative impact of present alliance nuclear doctrine, we urge the allied governments to reject NATO's insistence that nuclear weapons be maintained, improved, and prepared for use indefinitely. The assumption that nuclear weapons are 'essential'—still embodied in NATO's Strategic Concept—fundamentally contradicts both the letter and the spirit of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control.

We urge the NATO allies to undertake a program of removal of tactical nuclear weapons from five Non-Nuclear Weapon States in Europe, and we call for renewed dialogue with Russia to further reduce and eliminate all nuclear arms. We anticipate further discussion of the report “Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World”, prepared by five senior military officers and strategists for discussion at NATO’s 59th anniversary summit last April. We utterly reject their recommendation that NATO should prepare to resort to a pre-emptive nuclear attack. Instead the NATO alliance, led by the United States, should take the lead to reduce current nuclear stockpiles and de-alert American and Russian weapons.

We are particularly concerned about the threat to the NPT, which was signed in 1968, entered into force in 1970, and has been signed by 187 countries. It is reviewed every five years, but remains threatened, in part because the 2005 Review Conference ended in disagreement. If the NPT’s upcoming 2010 Review Conference were allowed to fail as well, it could spell the end of one of the most successful arms control and disarmament treaties in history, with the world entering a ‘nuclear jungle’ characterized by unlimited nuclear proliferation leading to a war of all against all. Of particular importance in preventing this nightmare scenario is Article VI of the treaty, which commits the Nuclear Weapon States to ‘good faith’ negotiations on nuclear disarmament. This is commonly understood as the promise of the Nuclear Weapons States to begin to divest themselves of nuclear weapons in exchange for Non-Nuclear Weapon States not to acquire them. We urge the NATO allies to undertake serious negotiations on disarmament that honour their Article VI commitment.

The North Atlantic Council and NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group must work to resolve and calm and resolve East-West tensions and understand that they can no longer assume that a decades-old nuclear doctrine is still effective. Continued reliance on the nuclear weapons of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom for security in NATO can only encourage other countries to seek nuclear weapons for their own deterrent purposes, leading to nuclear proliferation and the strong possibility of accidental or even calculated use.

In conclusion, we urge you to recognize the validity of the World Court’s Advisory Opinion which unanimously reinforced Article VI of the NPT, emphasizing the obligation to pursue negotiations: “There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a successful conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.”

As part of those ‘good faith’ negotiations, we urge the governments of the NATO allies to reconsider and more substantively de-emphasize their own reliance upon nuclear weapons for their own security.

Signed:

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