

**Sunday, April 5, 2009**

**NATO's chance to join the new nuclear realism**

***As anticipated,[i] the just concluded 60th Anniversary NATO Summit in France and Germany launched a process to review the Alliance's Strategic Concept, including its nuclear weapons doctrine, with a view to adopting a new strategy at the next Summit.***

The final paragraph of the declaration on Alliance Security[ii] speaks of "renovating the Alliance," which begs the obvious question of why further renovate a house whose original design has long given way to a series of unwieldy lean-tos and whose function has little relevance to a dramatically changed neighborhood. But in the meantime and until that basic question is addressed, NATO's nuclear chamber certainly needs some serious attention.

"A broad-based group of qualified experts" is to assist the Secretary-General who, in turn and in consultations with NATO states, is to develop the new Strategic Concept for approval at the Portugal summit a year from now.

The much longer Summit Declaration,[iii] which also promises a new Strategic Concept, devotes only one of its 62 paragraphs (para 55) to nuclear issues, but it does include a welcome repetition of earlier declarations that "arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation will continue to make an important contribution to peace, security, and stability" (para 54). The nuclear paragraph reaffirms the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and calls on NATO members to work constructively toward a successful outcome for the 2010 Review Conference. The NATO leaders point out that the arsenals of member states have been "dramatically reduced" and they promise an ongoing commitment "to all objectives enshrined in the Treaty." They also call for universal adherence to the International Atomic Energy Agency's "Additional Protocol" – an agreement to allow more intrusive and effective inspections of nuclear facilities. Both Iran and North Korea are called on to adhere to all relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

A re-reading of the current Strategic Concept, adopted by the Washington NATO Summit in 1999,[iv] leaves little doubt of the need for major nuclear renovation. Eight of its paragraphs include substantive references to nuclear weapons, all reflecting an architectural style firmly rooted in the 1980s.

The 1999 document argues (para 46) that, due to "the diversity of risks with which the Alliance could be faced, it must maintain the forces necessary to ensure credible deterrence and to provide a wide range of conventional response options." It then goes on to say, "the Alliance's conventional forces alone cannot ensure credible deterrence. Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace."

Deterrence is presented as a broad, essentially open-ended, threat to use nuclear weapons against any aggressor – including, by implication, non-nuclear weapon states. The ultimate deterrent, i.e., “the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies,” is described as being “provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States” (para 62) – which, in the context of NATO expansion to the east, means the post-Cold War era has been one of the steady geographic expansion of the American nuclear “umbrella.”

The 1999 Strategic Concept sets out a commitment to the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons in Europe (para 46): “To protect peace and to prevent war or any kind of coercion, the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe and kept up to date where necessary, although at a minimum sufficient level.”[v]

Current NATO strategy also holds that “nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and the North American members of the Alliance. The Alliance will therefore maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe” (para 63).

The recent Obama-Medvedev statement[vi] is a measure of the extent to which NATO’s current retentionist nuclear doctrine is a serious security anachronism – out of date and out of place in the new security environment. Among other things, the American and Russian leaders declared the commitment of their “two countries to achieving a nuclear free world.” They also emphasized their support for the NPT, and called for negotiations toward “a verifiable[vii] treaty to end the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.” They emphasized the importance of the entry into force of the nuclear test ban treaty and US President Obama promised to work for American ratification.[viii] They also agreed to begin negotiations on a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with a view to reaching record low levels of legally binding limits on strategic nuclear weapons.

Language for a new NATO approach to nuclear weapons is available in the Obama-Medvedev statement, in the burgeoning anthology of nuclear abolition statements, and the logic on which the NPT itself was originally constructed – namely, that nuclear weapons, far from being “essential to preserve peace”, are ultimately an unacceptable risk to humanity, and that their elimination, not their retention, is essential to security.

Rather than asserting that the “strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance” are “the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies,” NATO’s new Strategic Concept would do well to reflect the new reality articulated by Mikhail Gorbachev’s warning that “with every passing year [nuclear weapons] make our security more precarious.”[ix] Indeed, a new NATO statement could borrow from the 2008 statement by Henry Kissinger and his colleagues[x] and thus also acknowledge that “without the vision of moving toward zero, we will not find the essential cooperation required to stop our downward spiral” toward greater insecurity.

Over the course of the next year NATO states will have the opportunity to restate the

vision and to make major efforts towards its realization.

[eregehr@ploughshares.ca](mailto:eregehr@ploughshares.ca)

### Notes

- [i] "NATO summit: a chance to kick the nuclear habit," Disarmingconflict post, 18 February 2009.  
[http://disarmingconflict.blogspot.com/2009\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://disarmingconflict.blogspot.com/2009_02_01_archive.html)
- [ii] Declaration on Alliance Security, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl on 4 April 2009.  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_52838.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52838.htm)
- [iii] Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl on 4 April 2009.  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_52837.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm)
- [iv] NATO. 1999. The Alliance's Strategic Concept, Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. on 23rd and 24th April 1999.  
<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-065e.htm>.
- [v] There are currently estimated to be between 150 and 240 nuclear weapons, all US B61 gravity bombs, held in five countries in Europe – Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Turkey. All of the European countries hosting US nuclear weapons are non-nuclear weapon state parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).  
[vi] Available at CBS News "Political Hotsheet." 1 April 2009.  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2009/04/01/politics/politicalhotsheet/entry4909175.shtml>
- [vii] Obama's support for a "verifiable" treaty is a reversal of the Bush policy.  
[viii] Also a reversal of Bush policy.
- [ix] Gorbachev, Mikhail. 2007. The nuclear threat. The Wall Street Journal, January 31.  
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117021711101593402.html#>.
- [x] Shultz, George P., William J. Perry, Henry A Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. 2008. Toward a nuclear-free world. The Wall Street Journal, January 15.  
[http://online.wsj.com/public/article\\_print/SB120036422673589947.html](http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB120036422673589947.html).
-

