



NATO Needs to Emphasise the Centrality of Arms Control

Martin Butcher of Pugwash writes on the nuclear side of NATO. He argues that the task for NATO leaders is to rebuild solidarity and reshape the Alliance to face new missions dictated by the transformed post Cold War, post 9/11 strategic and security environment. Further, that the North Atlantic Council should be a platform for consultation and negotiation of arms control positions within NATO. Finally, that NATO should not miss the opportunity to use the review of the Strategic Concept to greatly enhance the role of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in security building.

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Introduction

This year, NATO leaders will agree a new Strategic Concept for the Alliance, a document that will govern NATO's approach to its security for a decade or more. The threat posed to the Alliance by nuclear, biological, chemical or radiological weapons (WMD) and their means of delivery has for some years been identified as a central concern, the strategic concept talks present an excellent opportunity to consider how NATO nations can enhance their security through a stronger reliance on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

There are emergent threats or potential threats which, if not dealt with before they mature, could lead to the establishment of new or revived deterrent relationships which the Alliance might wish to avoid. There are also potential threats which would not be susceptible to deterrence, for example if a radical religious group were able to obtain a nuclear weapon. While the Alliance must maintain defences against such a possibility, it must be asked why NATO has moved away from threat reduction and prevention to drop to the extent that it has?

The security of NATO members, and of the wider world, would be enhanced by engagement with potential adversaries to allow the reduction and elimination of potential threats before they grow to a scale that actually menaces the Alliance. Where non-state groups are not amenable to such engagement, then support for non-proliferation measures which can deny them the means to use WMD are an essential component of future strategy. Finally, the Allies should discuss the extent to which NATO's nuclear posture harms the global non-proliferation regime and acts as a stimulant to threats and potential threats it is intended to deter.

A new emphasis on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament should be debated openly and widely. It is to be regretted that the preparatory phase of the Strategic Concept revision process is, for the most part, happening behind closed doors.¹ There is no involvement of NATO nation parliaments. Ministers are not giving a political lead. A Group of Experts gathers evidence behind closed doors. Even presentations by academics to the group are not published. Nuclear issues will be discussed by the group for barely two hours in formal session. At a time when NATO's nuclear deployments and strategy lack public support and democratic legitimacy, this is not enough.

¹ See analysis via NATO Watch www.natowatch.org and ISIS Europe www.isis-europe.org/index.php?page=reform

For decades, NATO has pursued dual track policies of deterrence and arms control as a means of managing nuclear threats. The balance of these policies has become distorted since the adoption of the last Strategic Concept in 1999. As they look to the future role of the Alliance, NATO nations must undertake an evaluation of current policy and practice. They must further engage in a review of their support for arms control and disarmament as threat reduction and elimination measures, and revise policy accordingly to become more effective at building NATO security.

A Lost Decade

During the past decade, NATO gave the appearance of abandoning any attempt at threat reduction through arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, in favour of a purely military response to potential WMD-armed adversaries. This is strange, given the successful use during the 1980s of multi-lateral agreements to reduce armaments and the likelihood of conflict, both nuclear and conventional. At the very least, the role of non-proliferation has been severely downgraded. This reflected US national policy under the Bush administration much more than it reflected the collective view of the Alliance.

At a time when NATO faces no military peer, it would seem only logical to use this position of strength to negotiate agreements with neighbours and near-neighbours that can obviate new WMD threats before they arise. However, European nations submitted to the Bush administration's global outlook, and allowed it to become the policy of the entire Alliance by default. This despite the fact that it is clear that European nations did not share the bleak world view emanating from Washington DC. The European Security Strategy² and the Strategy Against the Proliferation of WMD³ adopted by the EU places much more emphasis on multilateral diplomacy to construct security from WMD threats than is now the case for NATO – and yet, because of NATO's consensus rule Europeans were overridden by the United States.

A New Promise

That situation has now changed. Europeans are presented with another challenge – how to give their support to an administration keen to pursue arms control measures. President Obama's team is finalizing a START follow-on agreement with Russia, and the President has promised ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The US President has given nuclear disarmament a high profile, with his speech in Prague in April 2009, and the groundbreaking UN Security Council session in September 2009.

This new direction presents Europeans with a challenge. What can NATO allies do to support this President in his disarmament policies? And can this new direction be fully integrated into the new Strategic Concept, rather than being the Cinderella appendage to policy that it has become. For even the most problematic current potential nuclear weapons threats facing NATO nations are some years away from becoming real. There is a window, if all NATO nations would pull together, in which the security of the Alliance could be enhanced through reducing and eliminating potential threats.

² Council of the European Union "European Security Strategy". Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

³ Council of the European Union "EU Strategy against the Proliferation of WMDs". Available at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/03/st15/st15708.en03.pdf>

A Positive Contribution from NATO to the NPT Review Conference⁴

One particular emerging concern within the NPT review process has been a focus on Negative Security Assurances. This is certain to feature as a major issue at this year's Review Conference, and it is one area where NATO could, if it chose, play a crucial and positive role. However, nuclear use doctrine must change. While NATO and some of its member states continue to allow for the possible use of nuclear weapons against chemical or biological weapons (and in the case of the United States even against very large conventional weapons they describe as WMD), it is very difficult for NATO members to satisfactorily respond to the concerns of non-nuclear weapons states in the NATO periphery and the wider world.

During the 2008 NPT PrepCom the Ukraine made some concrete proposals to advance the issue. They noted that:

37. Accordance of the credible security assurances in the form of an international legally binding instrument will substantially enhance the nuclear non-proliferation regime, improve mutual trust and overall stability.

38. It should also be recognized that problem of security assurances will exist until purposes of nuclear disarmament are reached. Moreover, worth remembering the fact that some of the states possessing nuclear weapons remain outside of global regime of nuclear non-proliferation.

And then called for:

39. The 2010 Review Conference should reiterate its call upon all nuclear weapon states to strictly adhere to their existing respective pledges and find appropriate means to urgently address the security assurances issue. It may also recommend the UN General Assembly to adopt resolution, which would enable convening an International Conference under the auspices of the UN to discuss the security assurances issue with the purpose of finding the acceptable solution.⁵

NATO is in a position to engage this debate. While NATO is not a party to the NPT, all its member states are. They could, as a group, issue a working paper to the NPT Review Conference on how these proposals could work in practice, and to address other detailed points made by the Ukraine. They could also issue a declaration that NATO will never attack a non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT with nuclear weapons, and that the only purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the Alliance. This would do much to restore confidence in a regime that has been at a very low ebb.

There are other issues within the NPT context where NATO's current position is controversial.

The indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 was conditioned by non-nuclear weapon states in part on the conclusion of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban. All NATO nations except the United States have now ratified that Treaty, but the US has not. The Bush administration went so far as to explore withdrawing its signature from the CTBT, although that did not happen. The Obama administration has repeatedly said it will seek ratification of the Treaty, but a year into that administration NATO is still not offering practical or even declaratory support for the Treaty, thus undermining both the CTBT and faith in the NPT itself. It is

⁴ See also article on the NPT by Ian Davis "The 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference: Looking to a future without nuclear weapons?" in this ESR No. 48, February 2010. http://www.isis-europe.org/pdf/2010_artrel_446_esr48-npt-revcon.pdf

⁵ Preparing for a Successful Review Conference 2010, Working paper submitted by Ukraine, NPT PrepCom 2008. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/612/44/PDF/G0861244.pdf?OpenElement>.

time for NATO to state that it seeks US ratification of the CTBT, and Entry-into-force of that Treaty and that it stands ready to provide technical assistance to achieve these goals.

Another area where NATO's nuclear strategy could be hurting its defence efforts is the question of tactical nuclear weapons. This is also a hot button issue in the NPT review process. The German government initiative of November 2009 to call for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Europe opened this debate wide. They have strong support from many European nations. But others, including the Baltic States, and with former NATO Secretary General George Robertson as a spokesman, call for the retention of this remnant of the Cold War arsenal. The deployment of US nuclear weapons in NATO Europe, and the nuclear sharing programme under which some of these are allocated for Allied use in time of war is an impediment to progress. Nuclear sharing also means that several Allied nations have an ambiguous status as non-nuclear weapons states. Arms control, requires sacrifice of some military capability for a gain in net security. Removal of the US nuclear weapons from Europe would also open the door to discussions on elimination of thousands of tactical nuclear weapons held by Russia. All this would significantly strengthen the NPT, restoring much of the belief of non-nuclear states in the Treaty that has been lost over the past decade.

Reinvigorating Arms Control in the Alliance

From this analysis of NATO policy flow some the following conclusions. The task for NATO leaders is to rebuild that solidarity and reshape the Alliance to face new missions dictated by the transformed post Cold War, post 9/11 strategic and security environment. NATO must find a way to use its current experiences to craft a new Strategic Concept based on the security needs of the 21st century on which all members can agree. This task is difficult, but not impossible.

This strategic concept should:

- Rely on multi-lateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament as the primary tools for the reduction and elimination of all WMD threats and potential threats in the Euro-Atlantic area;
- Facilitate this through the removal of US nuclear weapons from Europe, the ending of NATO nuclear sharing, establish the principle that nuclear weapons should be based on the soil of the possessor nation;
- All Alliance members should consider how they can reduce and eventually eliminate the role of nuclear weapons in national defence policies, and how enhanced arms control policies could assist in bringing this to fruition.

Perhaps the most important shift that NATO could undertake would be the revitalization of the North Atlantic Council as a venue for consultation and negotiation of arms control positions with the North Atlantic Alliance. This has worked well for NATO in the past, and would do so again. Specifically, NATO could engage in a series of areas that directly affect the security of all Alliance members. These might include:

- Consultations with the US in the North Atlantic Council and with Russia in the NATO-Russia Council on future strategic arms control negotiations;
- Discussions in the NATO-Russia Council on globalizing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, as well as urgent talks on reinstating the Conventional Forces Europe Treaty;
- Consultations between NATO ministers, and between NATO and partners in Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, on arms control measures to reduce the threat of ballistic missiles;
- Examination of measures to reduce and eliminate specific WMD threats;

- Consultations on the entry into force of the CTBT, with a focus on US ratification and assistance that NATO as an organization can give to the CTBTO;
- A thorough study of all potential WMD threats to the Alliance and an analysis of measures that can be taken to eliminate them through multilateral negotiations, including concessions that NATO would need to make to achieve these goals.

Conclusion

NATO nations are currently fortunate that they face few if any immediate military threats to their security. Now is the time to act to enhance regional security by ensuring, through negotiations and the revitalization of NATO's role in arms control, that such threats do not emerge in the near future. NATO can act at the NPT Review Conference to contribute to a positive atmosphere in that forum.

It can use its Strategic Concept Review to greatly enhance the role of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in security building. This must be done openly, with the full engagement of NATO nations and their publics. What NATO does in this area will be watched closely by States around the world, and may well tip the balance either toward a continued trend toward proliferation or to a promotion of greater security through confidence building and other measures.

Martin Butcher is Special Projects Coordinator for the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and a consultant analyst on global security policy. The views expressed in this article are his own. He blogs on NATO issues at <http://natomonitor.blogspot.com>.



international security information service, europe

Rue Archimède 50, 1000 Brussels Tel: +32 (0)2 230 7446 Fax: +32 (0)2 230 6113
E-mail: info@isis-europe.org Internet: www.isis-europe.org