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OPEd

NATO Summit: A Chance to Kick the Nuclear Habit

By Ernie Regehr

While Afghanistan will certainly dominate the talk at the 60th anniversary NATO summit in April, leaders are also scheduled to launch a process to review the alliance's Strategic Concept, a key element of which is a controversial and outdated nuclear doctrine.

The Strategic Concept—the current version of which was adopted in 1999—is the alliance's official statement of purpose and outlines its force posture and approach to collective security. Nine of its 65 paragraphs refer to nuclear weapons, the central claim being that the nuclear arsenals of the United States, in particular, but also of the United Kingdom and France, are "essential to preserve peace" and are "an essential political and military link between the European and North American members of the Alliance."

Firmly rooted in East-West deterrence and nuclear war-fighting assumptions, NATO doctrine is markedly out of sync with the new anti-nuclear counsel from such Cold War stalwarts as Henry Kissinger, Helmut Schmidt, Richard Burt and a host of other government leaders and security professionals now calling for accelerated nuclear disarmament.

In his recent speech to the 45th Munich Security Conference, Mr. Kissinger reaffirmed his earlier call for the pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons, pointing out that "any use of nuclear weapons is certain to involve a level of casualties and devastation out of proportion to foreseeable foreign policy objectives."

Richard Burt, the senior arms control official in the administration of the first president Bush, now works through the Global Zero initiative, supported by the Simons Foundation of Canada

and a broad range of public figures, for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The group is pledged to work "for a legally binding verifiable agreement, including all nations, to eliminate nuclear weapons by a date certain."

Even the alliance leader is now committed, as the Obama White House website puts it, to pursuing the "goal of a world without nuclear weapons."

All these statements represent a rather large shift away from NATO's claim that nuclear weapons are "the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies."

This recent wave of nuclear abolition statements by mainstream security professionals is rooted in two linked concerns.

First, the 20,000-plus nuclear warheads remaining in current arsenals, several thousand of them poised on missiles ready for firing at a moment's notice, represent an ongoing threat of mass indiscriminate destruction to the point of global annihilation.

Second, that threat is heightened by the growing risk that nuclear weapons, as well as weapons-friendly technologies and nuclear materials, will spread to more states, and even to non-state groups.

NATO thus has the opportunity to fashion a new strategic doctrine that, on the one hand, takes full account of the threats posed by nuclear weapons, and, on the other hand, takes full advantage of the political momentum that is now finally available to allow states to get serious about doing something about that threat. Rather than continuing to insist, for example, that nuclear weapons "preserve peace," NATO doctrine would do well to follow the new realism of former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's assessment that "with every passing year [nuclear weapons] make our security more precarious."

Inasmuch as all NATO members are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a good place to start would be for the new Strategic Concept to welcome the groundswell of calls a world without nuclear weapons that the NPT envisions. Responding to those calls, NATO should then reaffirm its commitment to implementing the disarmament and non-proliferation priorities and procedures elaborated through the NPT review process.

One important measure of NATO's sincerity will be its handling of the 150-250 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons that remain in Europe. If it were to take up the proposal of former German

chancellor Helmut Schmidt that those now in Germany be removed, and then also remove those in the four other European states that currently host them, NATO would earn important disarmament bona fides and give a major boost of confidence to a seriously flagging non-proliferation regime. It would also honor the longstanding international call that all nuclear weapons be returned to the territories of the states that own them.

Non-nuclear weapon states of the NPT that are not part of NATO rightly regard the removal of nuclear weapons from the territories of European non-nuclear weapon states as essential for full compliance with Article I of the treaty. The NPT requires that "each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly."

The nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime is currently under severe stress. The failure of nuclear weapon states to fully implement the disarmament provisions of Article VI of the NPT, along with NATO's ongoing claim that it plans to rely on nuclear weapons for the foreseeable future, has entrenched the double standard of nuclear "have" and "have-not" countries. In the long run, that double standard is not sustainable. NATO cannot credibly claim that the security of NATO states sheltered within a peaceful Europe requires nuclear weapons, while at the same time calling on all other states, including those in conflict zones such as South Asia or the Middle East, to fully and unconditionally reject nuclear weapons.

At the coming summit, NATO has an opportunity to begin the process of reinventing its security doctrine, to take new initiatives to end its reliance on nuclear weapons, and to engage other states with nuclear weapons in the serious pursuit of reciprocal disarmament, and in the process revitalize the NPT.

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