

Advancing Disarmament: Canada and North Atlantic Treaty Organization Nuclear Policy

Fall 2006

NPSIA's Masters Class on Disarmament, Arms Control and Nonproliferation
(Shawn Beatty, Thad Blank, Sara Domina, Katherine Januszewska, Stuart Rothman)

I. *Introduction*

This discussion paper addresses Canada's potential to advance a nuclear-weapons free world. One way in which this can be achieved is by encouraging NATO to withdraw nuclear weapons from Europe. On the issue of disarmament and non-proliferation, Canada's stated policy objective is the reduction and complete elimination of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Canada has vigorously advocated the international community's efforts towards reduction of nuclear weapons through active participation in the Conference on Disarmament, support for Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones, strengthening of the NPT, and through ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). One particular way in which Canada should advance this agenda is through leveraging its status in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The U.S. continues to base nuclear weapons in six NATO countries despite the end of the Cold War. If Canada is serious about advancing the cause of nuclear disarmament, then advocating full compliance with the letter and spirit of the NPT within security organizations to which Canada belongs is an essential step. Canada should work to build consensus within NATO's Nuclear Planning Group to build consensus toward ending nuclear sharing agreements.

II. NATO Nuclear Sharing: History and Strategic Rationale

There are 480 American nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, stored at eight bases in six countries: Germany, Belgium, Italy, Britain, Turkey and the Netherlands. Such an arsenal is larger than the entire Chinese nuclear stockpile. These countries have technical nuclear sharing agreements, in which they allow the US to store weapons on their territory and maintain warplanes for delivery of the weapons, which can be transferred to the host country in the event of conflict. The weapons are gravity bombs of the B61-3, -4 and -10 types. The United States first deployed nuclear weapons to Britain in 1954 and sent 24 different weapons systems to Europe throughout the Cold War. In 1971, the number of American warheads in Europe peaked at 7,300. By 1994, U.S. President Bill Clinton cut the number of U.S. bombs to 480. In the mid-1990s, further cuts in the number of nuclear weapons deployed in Europe were rumoured. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, however, such cuts were never made. In July 2004, the United States Air Force awarded a \$2 million contract to upgrade the monitoring and equipment for the Weapon Storage and Security System (WS3) facilities at the NATO installations. Evidence indicates that the United States intends to maintain its nuclear arsenal in Europe for some time to come.

Originally, the reasons for the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe revolved around the threat of a Soviet ground invasion during the Cold War. Today, the decision to retain the weapons is justified by the claim that the weapons make a credible

contribution to the prevention of war in Europe and maintenance of peace and stability. The 1991 Gulf War and the discovery of the Iraqi nuclear development programme gave rise to the prospect that the so-called “rogue” states might develop weapons of mass destruction and threaten a European capital. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction became a new rationale for retaining U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. NATO statements indicated, furthermore, that the retention of American nuclear forces is an integral part of NATO’s nuclear posture, representing evidence of NATO’s cohesion, solidarity, and burden-sharing.

The outbreak of war in Yugoslavia disproved the theory that the U.S. nuclear arsenal in Europe contributes to the prevention of war in the region. Today, nearly all of the states that were once potential targets for the weapons are members of NATO. Weapons based in the United States can cover all of the potential targets covered by the bombs in Europe. A 2004 NATO issue paper discloses, moreover, that the readiness level of the nuclear strike aircraft in Europe had been reduced to months rather than days or hours. The operational need for keeping nuclear weapons in Europe can be brought, therefore, into question. Since training at the forward bases does not involve live nuclear weapons, there does not seem to be any need for a physical presence of these weapons at the European bases. If a crisis were to emerge, there would be ample time to transport the weapons from storage sites in the United States to the bases in Europe. After all, all NATO countries are under the umbrella of long-range U.S. and British nuclear forces. Tactical nuclear weapons in Europe seem to make little difference.

The deployment of U.S. weapons in Europe undermines efforts to improve relations with Russia and appears to threaten the interests of the U.S.-Russian

partnership. Although the current Bush administration has declared that Russia is no longer an immediate threat, Russian nuclear capabilities (and specifically its large number of non-strategic nuclear weapons) and targeting of Russian facilities continue to be named as justifications for retaining U.S. weapons in Europe. The Russian military is concerned that U.S. tactical weapons deployed in Europe could be used on Russian command centers and strategic nuclear centers.

III. Disarmament, Non-proliferation and NATO Nuclear Sharing

American nuclear weapons in Europe undermine global nonproliferation efforts and cast doubt on the West's commitment to the NPT. Nuclear burden sharing is perceived by many countries, especially the non-aligned states, as a violation of Article I and II of the NPT, which prohibits nuclear weapon states (NWS) from transferring nuclear weapons to non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) and NNWS from acquiring nuclear weapons. Although the U.S. insists that the nuclear warheads remain under American control, and could only be transferred during wartime, when the NPT would be void, sharing agreements that include NNWS maintenance of the technical capability to use nuclear weapons deployed on their territory are of questionable legality. Even if sharing agreements do not violate the letter of the law, they violate the spirit of the NPT in the perception of many NNWS.

Withdrawing the last tactical nuclear weapons in Europe will end the nuclear double standard of equipping non-nuclear countries with the means to conduct provisions for nuclear warfare. This effort would build confidence in non-nuclear weapon states of

the dedication and adherence of NATO member states to the principles behind the NPT, and send a positive signal about the benefits of being a part of a nuclear non-proliferation regime. Withdrawing these tactical weapons from Europe will bolster the NPT by devaluing nuclear weapons and diminish the prestige associated with them. If potential nuclear proliferators see the world's most powerful security organization demonstrating that deployment of tactical nuclear weapons are unnecessary for defense, they too will feel less of a need to count on nuclear weapons for their own defense. Canada and its allies will find it easier to influence the activities of potential nuclear powers if it not seen as acting with double standards.

IV. Recommendation and Conclusion

Canada has exercised leadership on disarmament issues within NATO in the past. In 1989, Canada ended participation in NATO technical nuclear sharing. In 2000, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy questioned the necessity of U.S. gravity bombs deployed in Europe in a speech to the North Atlantic Council Meeting. His successor also pressured NATO to consider "options for non-proliferation and arms control and disarmament." More recently, however, Canada has been meek in holding its closest allies accountable to disarmament commitments. Most notably, last year Canada dropped its sponsorship of a United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for the establishment of working groups on disarmament in the face of U.S. opposition.

Canada should take a leadership role in pressing NATO in general, and the United States in particular, to consider removing U.S. gravity bombs from Europe. As a first

step, Canada should call for a transparent debate on the role of U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Europe in post Cold War NATO doctrine. It should work to build consensus within NATO to remove U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe, including formal or informal coordination with Russia to encourage reciprocal drawdown of tactical nuclear forces. NATO remains vital to Canadian security and undermining the organization's cohesion is not in Canada's interest. Canada can avoid embarrassing the U.S. or fracturing NATO by working within appropriate NATO bodies such as the Nuclear Planning Group. However, Canada must maintain the position that nuclear sharing under NATO auspices is a valid topic for NATO discussion and not only a matter of U.S. nuclear posture. The international security situation continues to change, and so must NATO's nuclear arrangements.