



NATO Strategic Concept: Is it really “Creating Conditions” for a Nuclear Weapons Free World?

NATO has missed a golden opportunity to revise its nuclear sharing policy in this Strategic Concept. The concept, issued on Friday, 19 November “reconfirms that, as long there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance”.

When NATO frames itself as a nuclear alliance, it sends a signal to would-be proliferators that nuclear weapons are desirable as a component of anyone’s security strategy, it denies the agreed outcome to the NPT Review Conference to “reduce the reliance on nuclear weapons in security strategies” and it denies support to Prague vision of President Obama for a world free of nuclear weapons. Susi Snyder, Programme Leader for nuclear disarmament at IKV Pax Christi said “if NATO agrees to remain a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear weapons exist- does that mean they will be the last to disarm? Will NATO wait for every other country in the world to disarm first? NATO, as the world’s most powerful military alliance can play a much better, and bigger role in promoting global security than that.”

At the end of last year, the government coalition agreement in Germany supported calls for efforts to change NATO policy and remove the forward-deployed US B61 nuclear bombs from German territory. This has been supported by the full Bundestag in resolutions passed earlier this year. Other parliaments, including the Dutch, voiced support for a change in the nuclear sharing policy of the alliance. Belgium, Luxemburg, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and to a lesser extent Poland all expressed support for the idea of trying to reach consensus within NATO on a plan leading to eventual removal of the B61 from Europe.

The short, crisp 11 page document that the Secretary General opted to write is more than anything a public relations tool. A reflection of the lowest common denominator cast in an easy-to-read format aiming to convince NATO’s populaces of the relevance of the alliance in the 21st century. And to convince non-members that NATO is a friendly, but dedicated alliance, a close-knit group. Although the language in the new Strategic Concept appears to superficially support the nuclear policy status quo, it fails to conclude the debate about nuclear sharing. Its absence in the wording of the document shows that the consensus needed to change the policy has not been reached. But the absence of a confirmation of the forward- basing policy can be as well be read as a recognition that the support for nuclear sharing is feeble.

In the press conference announcing the new Strategic Concept, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that Tactical or Sub-strategic nuclear weapons will be addressed in a deterrence review on conventional and nuclear forces. This review should consider whether militarily redundant B61 bombs remain credible in that mix. It should also specify to what extent NATO is willing to act, and what confidence building measures it is willing to take to encourage but not be held hostage to reciprocity from Russia. Next to that, the review should conclude on a new declaratory policy for NATO that could include security assurances similar to those in the US Nuclear Posture Review, saying that nuclear weapons will never be used against non-nuclear states in compliance with their NPT obligations.

As long as France, the UK and the US remain inside NATO, NATO will remain a nuclear armed alliance. Though the new Strategic Concept does not clearly indicate a change in NATO nuclear policy, the

debate is not over and Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and to a lesser extent the US, will continue to have an opportunity to shift the French position and, at least, restructure the alliance nuclear posture to remove US weapons from Europe.

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