



Canadian Defence Policy

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Nuclear Disarmament and the 2018 NATO Summit

No single issue has yet emerged as a central focus for the coming NATO Summit.¹ Priorities listed by the NATO Secretary-General, as well as by some member States, include the need to reinforce alliance deterrence and defence (in the face of Russia's new assertiveness, is how it's usually framed), burden sharing (code for increased military spending as well as a greater military role for the European Union), reinforcement of transatlantic solidarity (code for trying to manage President Trump), projecting stability (a nod to continuing out-of-area or counter-terrorism operations), and attention to cybersecurity. Disarmament tends not to make such lists, but at least three nuclear issues warrant scrutiny and action by the NATO leaders: ballistic missile defence, the forward-basing of US non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe, and the ongoing nuclear posture of the alliance.

It is striking just how often pundits and analysts conclude that the alliance is at a "crossroads." Courtesy of a Google search, NATO has been at a crossroads over Afghanistan, Bosnia, Eastern Europe, Kosovo, 9/11, Russia, NATO's southern strategy, Trans-Atlantic relations, Turkey, US policy, Ukraine, the realities of the 21st Century, and so on and on. In the lead-up to the 2016 Warsaw Summit, a Polish journal described NATO at a "critical crossroads." In 2014, the European Leadership Network had it about right when it published a policy brief under the title: "NATO at a Crossroads – Again."

But it is both notable and disconcerting that web searches uncover almost no "crossroads" references on the matter of NATO and nuclear weapons. A New York *Times* analysis had NATO at a crossroads due to "fading US nuclear superiority," but that was in 1957. Only a 2010 power point by Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists, well known for his authoritative reports in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* "Nuclear Notebook," placed NATO at a "nuclear crossroads," the context being the then forthcoming NATO Strategic Concept update.

The absence of disarmament from most lists of priority issues for NATO can be largely attributed to the fact that the Alliance's current nuclear weapons posture is well-entrenched and enjoys broad support from those who set the NATO agenda – Washington, with renewed enthusiasm for its nuclear arsenal, still dominates.

But it's not quite that straight forward, or hopeless. NATO's nuclear posture remains controversial in the countries hosting US nuclear weapons, and the *status quo* will be hard to sustain. Beyond Europe there is a worldwide majority of states with membership in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that is growing increasingly impatient with NATO violations of Treaty Articles I and II² and with nuclear weapon state refusals to meet their Article VI disarmament obligations.³ Supporting the states that are impatient for change is a global network of civil society organizations with the means and public backing to continue challenging the nuclear *status quo*.

In other words, NATO is at a nuclear crossroads too. Prospects for moving disarmament up the priority list for the coming NATO Summit may still be modest, but that only heightens the obligation on like-minded Governments, think tanks, analysts, and civil society organizations to bring credible disarmament proposals⁴ to the attention of political leaders in NATO member states. The following commends attention to three basic nuclear issues/themes that face NATO member states.

1. NATO and Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)

The international community faces a stark reality when it comes to missile defence. As long as the United States (and NATO) and Russia fail to come to a genuine meeting of minds and accommodation on ballistic missile defence, further nuclear arms control and disarmament will be stymied. This emerging crisis was already anticipated in the 2011 New START Treaty. A preambular paragraph in the Treaty acknowledges the “interrelationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms,” noting that this connection will “become more important as strategic nuclear arms are reduced”⁵ – in other words, if arsenals decline, unilateral missile defence forces will be increasingly perceived as threatening the reliability of deterrent forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin reinforced this point in an official statement linked to the Treaty, explaining that further reductions in Russian arsenals would “be viable only in conditions where there is no qualitative or quantitative build-up in the missile defense system capabilities of the United States of America.”⁶

Hope that new agreements would follow from New START and provide for further reductions of deployed nuclear weapons will certainly be dashed without meeting Russian missile defence concerns. Indeed, even extending the current agreement beyond its 2021 expiry will be unlikely if the US and NATO forge ahead unilaterally with missile defence programs. That’s the stark reality the world will then face – the absence of any formal strategic arms limitation agreement.

The imperative to come to terms on missile defence applies to both the strategic-range, mid-course interception system based in North America, and the medium to intermediate-range interception system based in Europe and at sea. Of course, Russia too is pursuing missile defence capabilities, as is China, and those too will need to be brought to a negotiating table.

US/Russia accommodation on missile defence is not itself a sufficient condition for further disarmament, but it is a necessary condition. Russia remains deeply suspicious of US/NATO BMD programs and obviously has the means to opt out of strategic arms limitation agreements. The significance of the BMD question was implicitly recognized in the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept (SC), the most recent and still current SC. It states unequivocally that NATO “will actively seek cooperation on missile defence with Russia and other Euro-Atlantic partners” (para 19). In their 2012 “Deterrence and Defence Posture Review,” NATO states emphasized the same point, insisting that “in a spirit of reciprocity, maximum transparency and mutual confidence,” the Alliance “will actively seek cooperation on missile defence with Russia” (para 21). A 2017 report of the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly explains what happened to those pledges. As far as NATO is concerned, Crimea happened, and by April 2014 all NATO/Russia civilian and military cooperation had ground to a halt (para 57).⁷ The 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué included a less than fulsome offer to engage: “Should Russia be ready to discuss BMD with NATO, and subject to Alliance agreement, NATO remains open to discussion” (para 59).

NATO’s European Phased Adaptive Approach to missile defence has been under unilateral development, and deployment, since before 2011, when, among other things, American ship-based Aegis interceptor missiles and a radar installation in Turkey became operational. In 2016, “Aegis-Ashore” interceptors, updated land versions of the ship-based missiles, were installed in Romania, and the Warsaw Summit declared “the achievement of the NATO BMD initial Operational Capability” (para 57). NATO plans another expansion phase later this year when a NATO BMD base is to become operational in Poland. In the meantime, US deployments of Aegis ship-based radars and interceptors have steadily expanded.⁸

There are many reasons to question the efficacy of missile defence, in any of its iterations, but the more immediate issue for NATO is that its unilateral pursuit of BMD is destabilizing and is inimical to further reductions in nuclear arsenals.

Russia's concern continues to be that missile defence, both the US-based strategic range and the European-based medium and intermediate range versions, could become capable of "significantly reducing the effectiveness of Russia's strategic [deterrent] forces."⁹ The facts that the current European- and ship-based interceptors do not have the speed or range to attack Russian strategic missiles and that, as MIT Professor Ted Postol puts it, "past, present, and foreseeable missile defense systems are simply unable to discriminate between real warheads and decoys,"¹⁰ do not change the Russian calculus. Moscow is looking further ahead, and it understandably insists that, whatever the current capabilities, it must concern itself with the systems' potential capabilities. That means that as long as Washington and NATO continue to pour billions into BMD research and development and deployment, Russia has little incentive to pursue further arms reduction agreements (or even to honor current agreements).

NATO thus faces a decision in 2018 – should it go ahead as planned with the full implementation of the Polish BMD base, or should it press the BMD pause button and pursue serious discussions with Russia on nuclear disarmament and arms control and the future status of and cooperation on missile defence? It's an active question and is being debated in at least some mainstream policy circles¹¹ – with those in favor of a pause arguing that it is essential and urgent to re-engage with Russia in the interests of developing clearer awareness and understanding of the conditions under which further reductions in nuclear arsenals will be possible. Engagement on BMD is essential for there to be any prospects for extending New Start and agreeing on further reductions.

So that frames the obvious imperative, namely, that like-minded states within NATO press for a pause in NATO BMD deployment and encourage the resumption of the repeatedly promised dialogue with Russia on BMD limitations and/or cooperation. The immediate objective is to prevent BMD from blocking further nuclear disarmament efforts and to ensure that NATO is in fact acting on its stated resolve to "create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons" (para 26, 2010 SC).

2. US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe

NATO member states have hosted US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe since 1954¹², and while numbers have been sharply reduced, they remain in Europe as part of NATO's current deterrence and defence posture. They are meant to deter, but critics point out that there is little compelling evidence that those tactical nuclear weapons served, for example, to restrain Russia in any meaningful way – notably in relation to Ukraine or Georgia. Neither do the Baltic and other East European NATO member states that are most worried about Russia, take any apparent comfort from the forward basing of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe – they demand instead the presence, close at hand, of NATO conventional forces (like the trip-wire force Canada is leading in Latvia).

Not only should the case for removing those weapons now be obvious, doing so would clearly send a welcome and positive message to NPT states – namely, that NATO is finally prepared to move into full compliance with Articles I and II of the NPT. Removing those weapons from Europe would render the \$10 billion US B-61 "modernization" program pointless (although the Pentagon would probably still go ahead with B-61 "modernization," since it still has plans to assign some of the B-61s for deployment with US strategic bombers).

The prospects for removing those non-strategic weapons from Europe actually improved with the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept (SC). The SC continues to insist that nuclear weapons are vital to European security, but it introduces a significant change inasmuch as it no longer insists that such weapons be based in Europe. In the 1999 SC, nuclear forces were also described as “vital to the security of Europe” (para 42), and then it explicitly stated that the Alliance would “maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces *based in Europe*” (para 46, 1999 - emphasis added). It repeated the same point a few paragraphs later, insisting 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,” and that “the Alliance will therefore *maintain adequate nuclear forces in Europe*” (para 63, 1999). The 2010 SC says NATO will maintain an “appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces” (para 19, 2010), but it removes any reference to them being based in Europe. In 2010 the “supreme guarantee” of nuclear weapons is specifically said to be provided by strategic nuclear weapons in the US, UK, and France (para 18), with no reference to tactical weapons based in Europe.

The 2012 NATO “Deterrence and Defence Posture Review” pointed to a study mandated by the North Atlantic Council to review nuclear sharing arrangements, including a look at what such arrangements might be under reduced reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe (para 12). The NAC also called for the development of proposals for reciprocal Russian actions in the context of “significant reductions in forward-based non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to NATO” (para 27).

There is another reason why this is an important moment to raise the matter of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. In the coming years, all of the European host states (Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Turkey) will be deciding on whether to make their next generation fighter aircraft dual capable – that is, to build a nuclear weapons delivery capability into them. All five nuclear host states in Europe are committed to buying new generations of fighter aircraft over the next decade or so. Italy, Netherlands, and Turkey have said they would buy the US F-35, but they have not so far committed to including a nuclear weapons capability. Belgium and Germany have yet to choose a new fighter aircraft. Adding a nuclear weapons capability to fighter aircraft would add significant cost, and, much more significantly, would add consequential political costs for governments choosing the dual capability option.

All of this makes it an opportune time to seize on the documented shift in Alliance policy toward agnosticism on the question of non-strategic weapons basing in Europe, and urge like-minded NATO states to re-open efforts to have all US nuclear weapons removed from Europe, and thus to finally have NATO and the European host countries enter into compliance with Articles I and II of the NPT.

In a related action, but not as a condition of the above, NATO should also engage Russia in the interests of it becoming more transparent with regard to its stocks of non-strategic weapons, seeking confirmation that they are not deployed in close proximity to NATO states, and urging reductions in Russian stocks.

3. NATO’s nuclear weapons and disarmament postures

NATO has always insisted that “as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance” (preface 1999, para 17 in 2010). In one sense that is not a surprise – it’s what President Barack Obama said in Prague in 2009, and it can be understood as another way of saying that nuclear disarmament must be mutual and parallel.

In both the 1999 and 2010 versions of the SC, there is a promise that nuclear use would be contemplated only in “extremely remote” circumstances (para 64, 1999 and para 17, 2010). Nevertheless, both documents still declare nuclear forces to be “the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies” (para 62, para 18). The 2010

SC drops a 1999 statement that the purpose of nuclear weapons is to “ensur[e] uncertainty in the mind of *any aggressor* about the nature of the Allies’ response to military aggression” (emphasis added). Removing that provocative threat of possible nuclear use in response to “any” act of aggression is welcome but obviously remains well short of a no-first-use commitment – but perhaps it can at least be understood as a timid, tentative nudge in that direction.

The 2010 SC also commits NATO to at least some declaratory support for disarmament and arms control. In 1999, the only disarmament references were self-congratulatory descriptions of the advances made in the immediate post-Cold War years (para 21, 1999). The current version affirms the principle that “contributing actively to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament” is one of the ways NATO can help to “enhance international security” (para 4, 2010). It says NATO member States “are resolved to...create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons...,” as well as to play their part “in reinforcing arms control and promoting disarmament of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction....”. (para 26). It also declares a world without nuclear weapons to be the goal of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (para 26), making the pursuit of conditions conducive to such a world a legal obligation. NATO declares that it “seek[s] its security at the lowest possible level of forces” (an indirect but welcome reference to Article 26 of UN Charter).

The 2010 SC affirmations that “arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation contribute to peace, security and stability” (para 26, 2010) is important inasmuch as it doesn’t follow the more usual line of argument that disarmament can only be contemplated when the world is at peace. In other words, in this formulation disarmament is described, not as the result of peace, but as a means to peace.

It is still true that the main thrust of NATO’s nuclear posture remains unchanged by the 2010 SC. Nevertheless, the current SC does make a case for nuclear disarmament, and Canada and other like-minded states should be nurturing and promoting that (admittedly timid) impulse within the Alliance.

Hence, on NATO’s nuclear posture, Canada should be urging the Alliance to adopt an unequivocal no-first-use commitment, given the near certainty that any first use would be followed by retaliatory use and uncontrolled escalation. Of course, it has to be acknowledged that an Alliance no-first-use commitment would not be binding on France, the UK, and the US in their management of their own national arsenals.

Declaratory policies are not irrelevant, and in them NATO should be replacing its assertion of nuclear weapons as “the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies,” with the more practical and logical acknowledgement that “nuclear disarmament is essential for the security of the planet.” It should thus become the Canadian habit to remind (nag) NATO members and Alliance forums of the Alliance’s collective and formal commitment to seek “a world without nuclear weapons.” To that end, NATO should be urged to always ensure that its statements and declarations routinely and overtly welcome the durability and dynamism of the global disarmament movement, including:

- the persistence of civil society disarmament research, education and advocacy;
- the fact that 40% of the world’s people and 56% of its land areas are already within legally-binding nuclear weapons free zones;
- the fact that through the NPT 186 states have accepted the legal obligation never to acquire nuclear weapons and have, further, agreed to submit their disavowal of nuclear weapons to a rigorous verification regime; and
- the commitment that led a majority of states in the UN to elaborate the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Given Canada’s support for a treaty to control fissile materials (an objective not included in the 2010 SC, but included in the 2016 Warsaw Communiqué), it should be actively mobilizing support among NATO members

for moving the issue out of the CD and for acknowledging the need to control existing stocks, as well as to halt future production. NATO should also be urging all its members to ratify the CTBT.

From competitive defence to mutual security

It should be axiomatic that the objective of NATO is security, not military superiority – for it should also be obvious by now that the latter does not deliver the former. Security is built, among other things, on political stability, economic viability, the rule of law, and international cooperation. States are more secure when their adversaries feel themselves to be secure. Military postures that posit threats and counter-threats escalate tensions and dangers and produce a commensurate decline in security. It is the difference between military competition and mutuality. Here is how Lester B. Pearson put it:

“In all the long story of mankind, arms alone, however powerful, have never been sufficient to guarantee security for any length of time. Your strength for defense becomes the weakness of those against whom you feel you must be ready to defend yourself. Your security becomes their insecurity; so they in turn seek safety in increased arms. A vicious circle commences which in the past has cost untold misery and destruction and might now, if we cannot cut through it, cause mankind's extinction.”

Cutting through it today means building public confidence and institutions to demonstrate that military competition need not still be the measure of relations between the old Cold Warrior states.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)¹³ was founded to do just that, on an understanding that the security of Eurasia rests on three mutually reinforcing pillars: respect for human rights and basic freedoms, the pursuit of mutuality in economic development and environmental protection, and a commitment to political and military co-operation throughout the region. NATO, a subset of states within the OSCE, has nevertheless adopted a post-Cold War posture which privileges military expansion over cooperation and the pursuit of competitive security over the mutuality of common security – a destabilizing posture only sporadically tempered by NATO-Russia consultation or engagement. Russia, for its part, has challenged international laws and norms. And both together have consistently heightened tensions and frustrated global aspirations for a world without nuclear weapons.

It is the habit of NATO, the habit of any military alliance, to argue that “progress on arms control and disarmament must take into account the prevailing international security environment,” and that the “conditions for achieving disarmament are [invariably] not favourable” (2016 Warsaw Summit, para 65). But others ask why it was possible, under the less than favourable security conditions of the Cold war, to conclude a succession of major bilateral and multilateral arms control agreements (e.g. NPT, SALT I and II, ABM, BWC, CFE Treaty, Open Skies, Stockholm and Vienna CSBM Agreements, Threshold Test Ban, and INF). The appropriate conclusion is clear: far from precluding nuclear disarmament, current international security conditions make it an urgent imperative.

Notes

¹ NATO Summits – the next one will be in Brussels on July 11-12 of this year – are meetings of the North Atlantic Council at the Heads of State and Government levels. Held occasionally, Summits are sometimes called when new members are to be accepted or when significant new policy directions are planned, but neither of those seem to apply this time around.

² All NATO countries, except for France, the UK, and the US, are non-nuclear weapons states under the NPT, and Article I prohibits nuclear weapon states from transferring nuclear weapons to them, while Article II prohibits non-nuclear

weapon states from receiving such weapons. When the NPT was established, such transfers had already taken place and the situation has been informally tolerated – but that tolerance is running out.

³ That impatience was on full display when 123 states collectively negotiated and adopted (in 2017) the new Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

⁴ Canadian civil society is well served by several current documents that speak to the question of NATO and Nuclear Disarmament:

- CNANW Letter (April 2018): “NATO and Nuclear Disarmament: Global Leadership Required;”
- G-78 Defence Policy Statement (updated in April 2018): “A Shift to Sustainable Peace and Common Security;”
- Pugwash Summary of the 2017 Halifax Conference: “Getting to Nuclear Zero: Building Common Security for a Post-MAD World” (the full conference report will also become available).

⁵ New START, Treaty Text. <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/c44126.htm>

⁶ “Statement of the Russian Federation Concerning Missile Defense,” April 7, 2010. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/rls/140187.htm>

⁷ “Ballistic Missile Defence and NATO,” Report of the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 07 October 2017 (Joseph A. Day of Canada, general rapporteur). www.nato-pa.int

⁸ By the end of 2018, NATO will have 32 Aegis-equipped ships and 48 land-based interceptors. Ian Johnson, Joel Beckner, Heng Qin, and Nadezhda Smakhtina, “New Life for New START?” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 26 May 2017. <https://thebulletin.org>

⁹ Ian Johnson, Joel Beckner, Heng Qin, and Nadezhda Smakhtina (2017).

¹⁰ Ian Johnson, Joel Beckner, Heng Qin, and Nadezhda Smakhtina (2017).

¹¹ John Grady, “Panel: Trump Must Make a Choice in European Ballistic Missile Defense,” US Naval Institute, 17 February 2017. <https://news.usni.org/2017/02/17/panel-question-facing-trump-administration-european-missile-defense-united-state-go-ahead-next-phase-program-says-deter-iran-pause-let-se>

¹² Hans M. Kristensen, “U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe: A Review of Post-Cold War Policy, Force Levels, and War Planning,” Natural Resources Defense Council, February 2005. <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/euro.pdf>

¹³ Elements of the following are drawn from the CNANW statement (2018) – see Note 2.