

GREENPEACE Briefing

NATO Summit Meeting, Prague, November 21-22, 2002

Current situation

NATO currently has nineteen members – Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Seven of these currently have between them an estimated 150 US air-launched nuclear bombs based on their territories at the following military facilities:

- Kleine Brogel Air base, Belgium;
- Ramstein and Buechel Air bases, Germany;
- Araxos Air base, Greece;
- Aviano and Ghedi-Torre Air bases, Italy;
- Volkel Air base, the Netherlands;
- Incirlik Air base, Turkey and
- Lakenheath Air Base, United Kingdom.

Military personnel from these countries train to handle, store, plan and use these nuclear weapons with their own aircraft and bases.

All NATO member states discuss nuclear doctrine including strategy and operational planning for their use at regular meetings of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) (see appendix below).

To avoid contradictions with US policy, NATO policy has traditionally broadly mirrored that of the US. The US has therefore effectively had a veto over any changes to NATO nuclear doctrine. As can be seen below NATO nuclear doctrine has closely followed the US as it has evolved over the last fifty years.

US Nuclear Doctrine

In March of this year extracts from the new US review of its nuclear doctrine were leaked (1). The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), marked a fundamental shift in why and how US nuclear forces could be used from what was previously described as a purely 'defensive weapon of last resort' to an 'offensive' weapon that could be used pre-emptively.

The review called for a 'new mix' of nuclear, non-nuclear and defensive capabilities, including a national missile defence system ("Star Wars") to form a 'New Triad.' According to the review, the U.S. will now actively plan nuclear strikes for a range of contingencies that can then be adapted quickly without the current (up to) two-day delay to retarget U.S. operationally deployed nuclear forces. Contingencies for which a nuclear strike may be felt necessary include an Iraqi attack on Israel or its neighbours, a North Korean attack on South Korea, or a military confrontation over the status of Taiwan. Unexpected contingencies described in the review are '*sudden and unexpected security challenges like the Cuban Missile Crisis*' or an opponent's surprise unveiling of an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

This reverses the previously policy agreed to by all five nuclear weapons states in 1995 that they would not attack with nuclear weapons any nation without nuclear weapons unless they were in an alliance with a nuclear weapons state.

The NPR warns that today's US nuclear arsenal is too old fashioned and inflexible for modern military needs. It calls for new capabilities to be developed '*to defeat emerging threats such as hard and deeply buried targets, to find and attack mobile and*

NATO nuclear doctrine

In the 1950's and 60's NATO followed the US doctrine of MAD (mutually assured destruction) whereby both the US and Russia understood that an attack by one would lead to massive retaliation by the other. Then in line with US policy NATO doctrine changed in 1967 to one of 'flexible response' i.e. in response to an attack there might or might not be a full-scale nuclear response. With US nuclear doctrine shifting from an emphasis on deterring the use of weapons of mass destruction through the threat of retaliation to one where nuclear weapons may be used first - even in a conventional conflict or before a military conflict has begun – NATO doctrine will be under pressure to do likewise.

relocatable targets, to defeat chemical or biological agents and to improve accuracy and limit collateral damage.' It calls for the development of nuclear weapons to achieve these capabilities through '*extensive research and timely fielding of new systems*' and that they are '*imperative*' if the New Triad is to be a '*reality*.' [emphasis added]

To do this 'Advanced Warhead Concept Teams' are to be established inside each of the three nuclear weapons laboratories to assess evolving military requirements, investigate options, and work out what is or is not possible.¹ These teams are to look at existing warhead designs and develop new ones with the work in some cases going beyond theory and involving the construction of components and warheads that could be placed in the active stockpile.(2)

Whilst US State Department officials have attempted to dismiss this document as not being a formally adopted policy, the 2002 US Department of Defense report to the President and Congress describes the NPR as a "blueprint" that signifies "a major departure in approach" to past US nuclear doctrine.

¹ US Nuclear Posture Review submitted to Congress on 31 December 2001. Available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>

² *ibid.*

NATO has never explicitly ruled out "pre-emptive action" but it does not explicitly authorise it to be considered either. In contrast, the new US National Security Strategy prepared by the White House outlining US defence and foreign policy does. By keeping its nuclear policy ambiguous NATO maintains maximum flexibility in determining its response to any future attack.

NATO nuclear doctrine is publicly declared in its Strategic Concept:

"...NATO's ability to defuse a crisis through diplomatic and other means or, should it be necessary, to mount a successful conventional defence has significantly improved. The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated by them are therefore extremely remote."³

Any future change in NATO philosophy would involve a change in this document.

The Strategic Concept was first published in 1991 and is the authoritative statement of the Alliance's objectives and provides the highest level guidance on the political and military means to be used in achieving them.

It was last updated in 1999 at the 50th anniversary summit in Washington. The part relating to nuclear doctrine was left virtually unchanged from the 1991 version. The only substantive change, reflecting the security context a decade after the end of the Cold War, was that the document referred to the use of nuclear weapons as now being "extremely remote" rather than the "even more remote" (see above)

In the lead up to the 1999 Summit Germany, supported by Canada, argued for a discussion on NATO's nuclear stance and for a task force to be established to review NATO nuclear policy. German leader Gerhard Schroder went further and insisted that NATO conduct a review of its first use policy. At the time there was strong US opposition to such a review arguing that it would "prove non-productive and damaging". As a result, no substantive discussion or debate took place.

NATO DOCTRINE - MOVING TOWARD PREEMPTIVE STRIKE

Extracts from the US Nuclear Posture Review completed at the beginning of 2002 reveal that the US has been seeking a change in NATO policy:

"Dual-capable aircraft and nuclear weapons in support of NATO. DoD will not seek any change to the current posture in FY02 but will review both issues to assess whether any modifications to the current posture are appropriate to adapt to the changing threat environment. A plan is already underway to conduct a NATO review of U.S. and allied dual capable aircraft in Europe and to present recommendations to Ministers in summer of 2002. Dual capable aircraft and deployed weapons are important to the continued viability of NATO's nuclear deterrent strategy and any changes need to be discussed within the alliance." (p. 44)

The results of this NATO review were presented to Defence Ministers at their meeting in June this year but they remain classified. The only public statement from NATO press officers has been: "We provided guidance to further adapt NATO's dual-capable aircraft posture..."

Three years on from the last serious discussion about NATO nuclear doctrine much has changed in US thinking. This will clearly have an impact on NATO.

Whilst most NATO member states may individually view the occasions on which nuclear weapons may be used as "extremely remote", their most powerful member (the United States) clearly does not. The question is: will NATO governments publicly endorse the new US nuclear policy by changing the NATO strategic concept or will there merely be a tacit acceptance of it? Given the significance of this decision, there must be a public debate, including in all parliaments, within NATO countries about any change in NATO policy. Greenpeace urges NATO leaders to reject the Bush Administration's Nuclear Posture Review as the basis for NATO policy at the upcoming Prague meeting, and clearly pledge that they will not support a policy of the pre-emptive or first-use of nuclear weapons.

The NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG)

The Defence Ministers of member countries that take part in NATO's Defence Planning Committee meet at regular intervals in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), where they discuss specific policy issues associated with nuclear forces.

The work of the Nuclear Planning Group is prepared by an NPG Staff Group composed of members of the national delegations of countries participating in the NPG. The Staff Group carries out detailed work on behalf of the NPG Permanent Representatives. It meets regularly once a week and at other times as necessary.

The NPG High Level Group (HLG) was established as a senior advisory body to the NPG on nuclear policy and planning issues. In 1998/1999, in addition to its original portfolio, the HLG took over the functions and responsibilities of the then Senior Level Weapons Protection Group (SLWPG) which was charged with overseeing nuclear weapons safety, security, and survivability matters. The HLG is chaired by the United States and is composed of national policy makers and experts from capitals. It meets several times a year to discuss aspects of NATO's nuclear policy, planning and force posture, and matters concerning the safety, security, and survivability of nuclear weapons.

The *Nuclear Policy Directorate* provides staff support to the Secretary General, the Nuclear Planning Group and its senior body, the High Level Group (HLG), and to the Senior Defence Group on Proliferation. Its main functions are to assist in the development of all matters of nuclear policy and strategy, including the development of nuclear planning and procedures, exercises and training activities; and to assist in the coordination of NATO's defence-related activities in response to risks stemming from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their associated delivery means. Part of the latter function will in future be fulfilled by the new WMD Centre, which has been established within the

Division of Political Affairs. The Directorate is also responsible for the preparation of meetings of the Nuclear Planning Group at Ministerial, Permanent Representative and Staff Group levels, and for the development of public information on NATO's nuclear posture and defence-related response to proliferation risks.

ⁱ “The Alliance’s Strategic Concept”, NATO Press Release NAC-S (99)65, 24 April 1999