

Ludo De Brabander – Hiroshima 6 august 2021

Vrede

Belgium

NATO and Nuclear arms

Dear Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this important 2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs about the nuclear sharing policy of NATO in Europe.

Four years ago, after several years of negotiations, 122 countries voted in favour of the new Ban Treaty ([Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#)). Unfortunately, 69 nations did not vote at all. They didn't even take part in the negotiations. Among them the nuclear weapon states and all NATO members except the Netherlands that voted against as only country.

NATO: nuclear alliance

NATO and governments of member states claim that the TPNW is incompatible with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and even undermines it. It is important to recall that a key motivation of the states that negotiated the TPNW was to take forward the implementation of the nuclear disarmament obligations of article VI of the NPT. This intention is also clearly stated in the preamble of the TPNW. Article VI of the NPT legally obliges all states parties to pursue “negotiations” and “effective measures” “on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control”. That is exactly what the TPNW does. The research services division of the German federal parliament, wrote in a detailed paper in January 2021: “The TPNW does not undermine the NPT; it is part of a common nuclear disarmament architecture.”

Nevertheless, despite the obligations under article VI of the NPT, most NATO member states as well as all nuclear states, have been boycotting the negotiations. Worse, NATO started a disinformation campaign with the false claim that the Ban Treaty undermines the nuclear disarmament regime.

The real reason is that NATO fears the treaty as a threat to the organization's political unity over its nuclear strategy. According to NATO: “Nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence, alongside conventional and missile defence forces. NATO is committed to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, but as long as nuclear weapons exist, it will remain a nuclear alliance.”

However, NATO defined itself only recently – at the Lisbon NATO Summit in 2010 – as a nuclear alliance. In NATO's earliest years, nuclear weapons were in fact not even mentioned in the alliance's strategic concepts. Nuclear arms were considered as a responsibility of NATO's individual nuclear states. Only the last decade, NATO accepted a strategic concept in which it considered itself a ‘nuclear alliance’.

The collectivization of nuclear responsibility

From the 1960s, the US began to deploy nuclear weapons in other NATO member states, giving them a role in the planning and preparation of nuclear war. In the years that followed, all countries except France became involved in the nuclear deterrent policy, which was increasingly defined as a form of alliance solidarity. The reason? International support among the population for nuclear disarmament grew. This led to [the collectivization of political responsibility for nuclear weapons](#).

Why? First, the nuclearization of NATO as an organizational identity allowed pro-nuclear actors to justify costly nuclear modernization programs and nuclear deployments as contributions to alliance "solidarity" and "cohesion". Second, this nuclearization of NATO undercut the potential for intra-alliance resistance to nuclear arms. Calls for nuclear disarmament could thus be seen as anti-NATO.

Nuclear sharing became a core component of NATO's strategy. Of the three nuclear powers in NATO (France, the United Kingdom and the United States), only the United States has nuclear arms in other member states: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

Currently, the US has about 150 tactical B61 gravity bombs deployed in those countries. They have to be mounted into (not in Turkey) dual capable aircraft (DCA) in war time. This can be considered as a transfer or control by non-nuclear states of nuclear arms which is in breach with the [non-proliferation treaty](#) (NPT) of 1970. The NPT prohibits the direct or indirect transfer or control of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states.

These bombs will soon be replaced by new B61-12 bombs. They are equipped with an electronic tail kit that can guide the bomb to its target.

They have also lower yield options. The mixture of both, precision and lower yield options could be seen by war planners as [more useable](#) allowing some targets that previously would not have been attacked because of too much collateral damage to be attacked anyway. This is a very dangerous development. The new B61-12 will increase the danger of a war with nuclear weapons eroding the concept of 'deterrence'.

European population opposes nuclear weapons

According to [recent surveys in several European countries](#), a majority of the population in Europe is in favour of a ban on nuclear weapons. This is what 77% of those surveyed want in Belgium, 89% in Spain, 87% in Italy, 78% in the Netherlands and Denmark. The challenge for the peace movement is to translate that support from the population into political pressure and to get nuclear weapons back high on the political agenda. We must not miss that opportunity because in a few years' time the new B61-12 bombs will be deployed in Europe.

The world is at a crossroads and Europe has to make a strategic choice: remain part of the arms race or demonstrate global leadership by promoting a peaceful approach towards common global security.

Last year European peace organisations started a new "[nuke free Europe](#)" campaign against NATO's nuclear sharing policy aiming for the removal of all nuclear weapons in Europe. During the month of September, in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and the UK

there will be actions near military bases with US nuclear weapons. Our first goal is to get the nuclear arms back on the political agenda and to raise awareness among other movements (trade unions, the climate movement, women and youth movement) about the planetary threat of nuclear weapons and the need to act.

A first condition is to end nuclear ambiguity which means that the governments of the nuclear sharing countries acknowledge that nuclear weapons are deployed on its territories, which is not the case until today. We need a free and open democratic discussion so that the presence nuclear weapons in the sharing countries can politically and legally be contested. Secondly, we need a clear political commitment and time schedule for European nuclear disarmament, starting with negotiations between the US/NATO and Russia to dismantle US nuclear bombs followed by agreements on nuclear disarmament in France, UK and at least the European part of Russia. Once nuclear disarmament is reached Europe can legally become a nuclear weapon free zone. At the same time the door is open for European countries to fulfil their obligations under the NPT and to sign and ratify the TPNW.

To recall the iconic slogan of Greenpeace: “No time to waste!”