

Nuclear Weapons, Arms Control and Disarmament

The Communiqué paragraphs concerning nuclear weapons, arms control and disarmament are interesting and out of the ordinary for NATO.

We reaffirm that arms control, disarmament and non proliferation will continue to make an important contribution to peace, security, and stability and, in this regard, to preventing the spread and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their means of delivery. We took note of the report prepared for us on raising NATO's profile in this field. As part of a broader response to security issues, NATO should continue contributing to international efforts in the area of arms control, disarmament and non proliferation, and we task the Council in Permanent Session to keep these issues under active review.

The Alliance has reduced both its conventional forces significantly from Cold War levels and has reduced nuclear weapons assigned to NATO by over 90%. Allies have also reduced their nuclear arsenals. France has reduced the types of its nuclear systems to two, the number of its nuclear delivery vehicles by over half, and has announced it will reduce the number of its nuclear warheads to fewer than 300, with no other weapons beside those in its operational stockpile. The United Kingdom has reduced to one nuclear system, and has reduced the explosive power of its nuclear stockpile by 75%, and its number of operationally available nuclear warheads to fewer than 160. The United States has reduced its nuclear weapon stockpile to less than 25% of its size at the height of the Cold War, and decreased tactical nuclear weapons assigned to NATO by nearly 90%.

This statement is notable as it does not reiterate the Alliance's usual position that nuclear weapons are an essential element of Alliance security and an indispensable part of the trans-Atlantic link. Germany and Norway have been pressing the Alliance for a comprehensive review of arms control policy, and it appears that this continues. It is notable while the Alliance reports its and its members achievements in reducing their nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War, there is no statement of future action. NATO has, in the past, actively used arms control and nuclear reductions to enhance its security and that of the whole of Europe. In this context, it is disappointing not to see active support for vital non-proliferation and disarmament measures like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Fissile Material Cut-Off treaty. It is to be hoped that with the departure of President Bush, US and NATO policy can become more forward leaning in this area.