



British American Security
Information Council

NATO's Nuclear Posture discussed at the NPT Review Conference

Event summary by BASIC Program Director Anne Penketh, who attended for the duration of the NPT Review Conference

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The prospect of a shift in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's position on tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in 2010 was the subject of a BASIC event held at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

Ambassador James Goodby, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and BASIC Board member pointed out that the debate within NATO is taking place against a backdrop of the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. Consequently, he said, he believed that NATO's final decision after the Strategic Concept Review is unlikely to be the continuation of the status quo.



Nickolas Roth (right) discusses Congress' role in spending on U.S. nuclear bombs in Europe

Hans Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, and source of many of the published figures on NATO's deployments, agreed that the Obama administration is "quite strong" on the possible withdrawal of the estimated 200 gravity bombs from

five countries in Europe. He said that the fact that the administration is linking the fate of the weapons to talks with Russia is "an odd attempt to turn events around because Nato has been happy to move unilaterally in the past" by removing tactical nuclear weapons from the UK and Greece.

Paul Ingram, BASIC Executive Director, looked at the deployment of the weapons under the terms of the NPT, saying that "the legal basis for nuclear burden-sharing is questionable under Article I and II" of the treaty, so had an impact on diplomatic negotiations around the NPT. He highlighted the lack of military justification for the deployment of the B61 bombs in Europe, further weakening NATO's diplomacy. The idea that following their withdrawal, NATO would collapse because the US is no longer committed to Europe "is not a strong argument", and rather unrealistic. He warned that on the contrary, if the status quo is left in place, unilateral withdrawal is more likely because of domestic political and financial pressures. "If that happens, it will weaken the alliance because it will produce consolidation by stealth", by moving the weapons out of states that wish them to be removed. He added that it was "far from impossible" that the bases would remain (leaving open the possibility of future deployment) but that the weapons would be removed to the United States.

He noted that the precedent of Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, unilateral statements announced in 1991 by the US and Russian presidents, are being mentioned as a possible framework for the removal of tactical weapons from Europe rather than a treaty which would require ratification.

Nickolas Roth, program director of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, considered the Congressional funding of feasibility studies for the modernization of the B61 bombs in Europe. This year the budget request is "four times the amount of last year's request", and likely to amount to around \$2bn for the life extension of the warhead. The costs have risen because the weapons labs will be looking at modifying the warheads and substantial replacement of components. He noted that 34 Senators (or one third of the Senate) are directly impacted by funding for nuclear weapons. Why does President Obama go along with the weapons labs directors? Because, according to Mr. Roth, he needs two thirds of the Senate to vote for New START.

The panel also discussed safety and security aspects connected to the tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Later on Monday, BASIC hosted a strategy and coordination session of US and European non-governmental organizations whose work is focused on the removal of the tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

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