

Reports such as those written by the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament are necessary to have an open debate on nuclear issues. 2010 is an important year as the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference will take place and NATO will reveal its new Strategic Concept. These past couple of months have shown an increased focus on nuclear weapons and posture: President Obama gave an inspiring speech in Prague and the Global Zero Summit recently took place.

Ever since the idea of a planet without nuclear weapons has made its way into the world arena, NATO has often been the target of attacks to its nuclear posture. NATO Allies are parties to the NPT and therefore are bound by its provisions. It is often forgotten that the Alliance does support efforts to reduce nuclear weapons in a graduated manner and since 1991 over 90% of its nuclear stockpile has been reduced.

Nuclear weapons are the central pillar of the Alliance and they represent a link between all members of the Alliance since sharing the burdens and responsibilities of supporting and hosting the nuclear mission solidifies cohesion, and strengthens security for all. The primary role of NATO's military forces is to protect peace and to guarantee the territorial integrity, political independence and security of all Allies. Developments in international security have reduced but not obviated the need for nuclear deterrence. NATO faces threats not only from state actors such as Iran and North Korea but also from non-state actors such as Al Qaida.

NATO critics assume that if the Alliance were to get rid of its nuclear weapons, other actors would follow suit. This is a risk that NATO cannot take. Just last week Iran started producing enriched uranium at 20% and it has no plans of stopping nuclear development anytime soon. AQ Khan has sold information to state and non-state actors, but details of the buyers are unknown. In light of current global realities and challenges that the Alliance faces, any change in the present nuclear posture would be unwise and even dangerous.

There is no denying that NATO is receiving increased pressure from various entities to revise its nuclear posture. The Alliance is working on its new Strategic Concept and at this point it is unclear whether there will be any changes to its nuclear posture. The new American Nuclear Posture Review will probably set the stage for the road NATO chooses to follow. Any decision on changes to NATO's nuclear posture would have to be a collective Alliance decision.

In the meantime, the Alliance encourages all its Allies, partners, and indeed countries around the world to adhere to their international treaty and agreement obligations. NATO is creating a network of networks that will give the Alliance and the international community its best chance of making the world a safer place.

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