

2.5 NATO and Civil Society

Chair: Mary-Wynne Ashford, Physicians for Global Survival

2.5.1 Discussion

The goal of the working group was to arrive at a menu of Canadian policy options to address the issue of NATO's nuclear weapons policy, with particular attention to the role of civil society.

NATO Policy on Nuclear Weapons

NATO sees itself as responding to the new political landscape to create a secure Europe. It believes the two world wars underline the importance of building security in Europe.

It was noted that nuclear weapons policy was not currently on the agenda at NATO for the upcoming review. NATO is preoccupied with issues of new membership, stability in Eastern Europe, peace-keeping, and internal restructuring (including downsizing). NATO believes that there should be no change in nuclear weapons policy until certain political preconditions are met, and stability secured.

NATO's reasoning is that although the cold war is over, the 'Russian revolution' is not yet over - that is, the region is generally unstable. Because Russia is no longer capable of mounting a conventional attack against NATO, NATO's principal job has shifted. The perceived threat is no longer specific, but general; NATO believes that it must be prepared to respond to a threat coming from any direction.

This thinking informed NATO's decision-making on expansion. In addition, NATO felt a pressure from Eastern European states who were seeking membership for economic reasons and for help in updating militaries and ensuring civilian control over their militaries.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been active in disarming Europe; not since the 30's has there been such a low level of militarisation. In particular, it was claimed that NATO has downsized its nuclear arsenal by 90% from its cold war peak (and counter-claimed that advances in US arms technology, and the presence of US nuclear weapons in the region make this figure meaningless). There is to be no new deployment of nuclear weapons under the terms of the expansion.

NATO has a "Nuclear Planning Group" which meets weekly under the chairship of one of its members. France does not participate. Concerns could be raised in this forum.

NATO and other security organisations

The other European regional security organisations - WEU, which France promotes as an alternative to US-lead NATO and which has no sizeable arsenal, and OSCE - have mandates which overlap with NATO's. In principle, NATO views them as cooperative partners.

In addition, NATO sees its role as complementary to the UN's. For example, it is involved in Bosnia under a UN resolution to fill a need that UN has neither the mandate, organisational capacity, nor troops to fill itself. International will is lacking for the expansion of UN military capacity, in large part because the US is not keen on the idea.

Canada and NATO

Canada was in favour of admitting more members to NATO, and was the first to ratify the enlargement.