

NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING,
DECEMBER 14, BRUSSELS
PRESS BRIEFING

Introduction

NATO Foreign Ministers meeting as the North Atlantic Council in Brussels have one main item on their official agenda - to formally endorse a report on NATO arms control and disarmament policy.

*"In the light of overall strategic developments and the reduced salience of nuclear weapons, the Alliance will consider options for confidence and security building measures, verification, non-proliferation and arms control and disarmament. The Council in Permanent Session will propose a process to Ministers in December for considering such options. The responsible NATO bodies would accomplish this."*¹

Informally, Ministers are also likely to spend time continuing to discuss US "Star Wars" plans and their impact on the alliance.

Whatever the outcome of the review of NATO disarmament policy, it could all come to naught unless US plans to develop and deploy Star Wars are halted.

What is Star Wars?

Officially known as the national Missile Defence (NMD), it has been called "Star Wars" because of its similarity to the failed proposal pushed by former U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Both systems use radar and satellites to detect enemy missiles as they are fired, and U.S.-based missiles or lasers in space to destroy them before they reach their targets.

Two out of three NMD tests, conducted under ideal conditions, have been dismal failures. The enormous technical challenges of Star Wars have been likened to "attempting to hit a bullet with a bullet."

Up to four more tests are scheduled for 2001. This is also when the U.S. president must decide whether or not to approve the next phase of Star Wars around August/September. If he does say "yes" to the next phase, there would be at least fifteen more tests, and the system could swing into operation as early as 2005, although 2006 or later is more realistic.

Star Wars Threatens to Ignite New Nuclear Arms Race

The Cold War may soon return because plans for a new weapons system by the United States threaten to re-ignite old tensions among nuclear weapons states, and trigger a new nuclear arms race.

¹ Paragraph 32, Washington Summit Communiqué, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. on 24th April 1999

“ [Star Wars] would not only threaten the nuclear disarmament process but would also shatter the basis for nuclear non-proliferation and will give rise to a new arms race.” [Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue]

The Star Wars missile system will cost at least \$60 billion. Not only would US taxpayers' money be wasted, it would also cost the people of the world the hard-won progress already made on nuclear arms control and disarmament.

“We're against having a cure that is worse than the disease.” [Russian President Vladimir Putin on NMD, June 4, 2000]

Undermining Arms Control Agreements

Star Wars would expose all nations around the planet to new dangers. It would destabilize the current strategic “balance of terror” between the U.S. and other nuclear states and undermine key arms control agreements such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, described as the cornerstone of global strategic stability.

All current arms control and disarmament agreements are like building blocks, the 1972 ABM Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I) were agreed in tandem and along with the 1970 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty they provide the foundations for future arms control agreements. This led to START I and II which will reduce US and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals down to around 3,500 on each side. Which then led to the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (the first bilateral Treaty to rid the world of a whole class of nuclear weapons) and other unilateral gestures such as the abolition of tactical nuclear weapons from the world's oceans.

All of this could be at risk if the US proceeds headlong down the path towards deploying some form of Star Wars system.

"If ... the U.S. proceeds to destroy the 1972 ABM Treaty...we can and will withdraw not only from the START II Treaty, but from the whole system of treaty relations having to do with the limitation and control of strategic and conventional arms."
[Russian President Vladimir Putin]

Is Star Wars Necessary?

The U.S. government justifies the expense and risks of Star Wars as a defence against missile attack by so-called "states of concern", usually interpreted to be Iraq, Iran and North Korea. U.S. defence officials argue these countries

could, in five to ten years, develop missile technologies to attack the U.S. with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

Yet the present and future threat from these small nations is either non-existent or exaggerated. And even if it were technically possible, any nation launching such an attack on the U.S. would be committing immediate mass suicide, given the U.S. ability to retaliate with more than 12,000 nuclear warheads.

The Real Threats

The U.S. has more to fear from a "bomb in a suitcase" than from any "state of concern". Terrorists could easily smuggle nuclear, chemical or biological weapons into the U.S. via hundreds of routes or they could smuggle the components in separately and assemble a device close to a target

"US territory is more likely to be attacked with weapons of mass destruction from non-missile delivery... than by

The ABM Treaty – a quick overview

The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty prohibits the parties to the Treaty from deploying "ABM systems for a defense of the territory of its country".

The Treaty only permits each country to deploy an ABM system "for defence of an individual region", which in the case of Russia Moscow was chosen, with the U.S. choosing to nominate a site in North Dakota. Secondly, all the components of the one allowed system must be deployed within an area no greater than 150 kilometres in diameter.

The ABM Treaty also prohibits the development, testing and deployment of any air, sea or mobile land-based ABM components as well any components being placed in space, thereby, guaranteeing the purpose of the Treaty and ensuring that no party to the Treaty can violate it without a great deal of advance notice.

The ABM Treaty also fixed the location, coverage and tasks of each parties early warning radars to ensure they cannot be used to track incoming missiles and guide interceptors to them.

Most of the above restrictions and prohibitions would be breached if the US continues with even the small initial Star Wars system it currently proposes. There would need to be significant redrafting of the ABM Treaty to allow:

- the construction of a national rather than a regional national missile defense systems

missiles, primarily because non-missile delivery means are less costly and more reliable and accurate." [CIA Analyst Robert Walpole before the US Senate 1999]

U.S. Allies Opposed

"The more improvements that are made to the shield, the more improvements are made to the sword. We think that with these [anti-missile] systems, we are just going to spur swordmakers to intensify their efforts." [French President Jacques Chirac, interview with New York Times, 17 December 1999]

The Star Wars proposal has already been condemned by a number of U.S. allies including France, Germany, Belgium and Canada. They fear Star Wars would wreak havoc on existing and future arms control and reduction agreements and would destabilise, if not destroy completely, the current global strategic balance.

Parliamentary Committees in Britain and France have also condemned US plans with the British Foreign Affairs Committee concluded that:

"We recommend that the Government articulate the very strong concerns that have been expressed about NMD within the UK. We are not convinced that the US plans to deploy NMD represent an appropriate response to the proliferation problems faced by the international community. We recommend that the government encourage the USA to seek other ways of reducing the threats it perceives." [Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, "Weapons of Mass Destruction", 2 August 2000, para. 50]

China "...[Star Wars will] jeopardise the global strategic balance... disrupt the basis for international nuclear disarmament process and trigger off global weapons proliferation and another round of arms race. All the achievements already made in the field of international arms control and disarmament are in danger of being lost..." [Chinese Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs to the UN Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, Hu Xiaodi]

Russia "Such a step is apt to trigger an uncontrollable missile and nuclear weapons race, to jeopardize peace and security. In our opinion such actions may narrow down the prospects for further nuclear disarmament, may considerably weaken the non-proliferation regime, and may prompt the nuclear powers to reconsider their strategic weapons modernization plans." (Russian Defence Minister, Igor Sergeev, Itar-Tass, "Russia and India Worried by American ABM Plans", 29 June 2000)

At the United Nations General Assembly in November last year a resolution on the ABM Treaty was put forward by China and Russia. It was a direct reference to the US Star Wars proposal as the ABM currently prohibits "missile shields" such as Star Wars. The resolution stressed the "paramount importance of full and strict compliance" with the ABM Treaty and called for "continued efforts to strengthen it and to preserve its integrity and validity". The only countries to oppose the resolution were the United States, Israel, Albania, Micronesia and Honduras. In favour of the resolution were 88 nations, with 66 nations choosing to abstain, including the majority of NATO member states. France supported the resolution.

Though the U.S. government portrays Star Wars as purely defensive, key nuclear weapons nations such as China and Russia actually see it as an offensive initiative. They fear Star Wars would render their current nuclear arsenals obsolete; they would be unable to retaliate to a U.S. nuclear attack. If Star Wars goes ahead they will feel compelled to increase their own arsenals as a counter measure.

China is reportedly spending \$10,000 million on increasing the capability of its nuclear arsenal as it currently only has around two dozen nuclear weapons capable of striking North America, the size and type of nuclear arsenal that Star Wars is designed to defend against.

Can NATO stop Star Wars?

Yes. It was made clear earlier this year by President Clinton when announcing his decision to delay deployment that the support, or rather lack of it, was a decisive factor in his decision.

"...another critical diplomatic consideration in the NMD decision is the view of our NATO allies. They have all made clear that they hope the United States will pursue strategic defense in a way that preserves, not abrogates, the ABM Treaty. If we decide to proceed with NMD deployment we must have their support, because key components of NMD would be based on their territories. The decision I have made also gives the United States time to answer our allies' questions and consult further on the path ahead." [Remarks By The President On National Missile Defense, Gaston Hall Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1 September 2000]

The Real Solution

The real solution is not Star Wars but a policy of persuasive diplomacy, negotiations and economic incentives. "States of concern" should receive the message that developing missiles and nuclear, chemical and biological weapons will simply not meet their security concerns; rather they would make them worse. The U.S. has already adopted this approach with North Korea.

This approach must be coupled by determined negotiations by all nations to implement controls on ballistic missile technology and to outlaw the development, production and stockpiling of any nuclear, chemical or biological warheads.

Future NATO Arms Control and Disarmament Policy

Current NATO nuclear policy according to their Strategic Concept is that:

To protect peace and to prevent war or any kind of coercion, the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces based in Europe and kept up to date where necessary, although at a minimum sufficient level. Taking into account the diversity of risks with which the Alliance could be faced, it must maintain the forces necessary to ensure credible deterrence and to provide a wide range of conventional

*response options. But the Alliance's conventional forces alone cannot ensure credible deterrence. Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace.*² [emphasis added]

This is completely incompatible with any arms control and disarmament policy that NATO may agree to implement.

As long as NATO member states continue to believe that as an alliance nuclear weapons possession "remains essential to preserve peace" they are sending a clear signal to the nations of the world that they have no intention of getting rid of their nuclear arsenal, and that nuclear weapons still have a role to play in a nation's and a military alliance defence and foreign policy.

Whilst many NATO member states espouse their commitment to nuclear disarmament and work actively on the diplomatic stage to achieve this goal, this is disingenuous when at the same time they belong to a nuclear alliance and their military spends time training for fighting a nuclear war. For those seven NATO nations (Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Britain) who base US nuclear weapons for use by NATO on their territory this is particularly true.

Only Britain is a recognised possessor of nuclear weapons under the international nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the other six are not. Yet, they are de facto nuclear weapons possessors as are the other ten supposedly non-nuclear NATO member States, and they should be recognised as such.

The only acceptable, realistic arms control and disarmament policy for NATO to adopt would be for them to:

- Renounce the possession of nuclear weapons as an essential part of the Alliance;
- Turn the Nuclear Planning Group, that currently plans for nuclear war, into a Nuclear Disarmament Group, that plans for and politically promotes ways to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, and
- Withdraw US tactical nuclear weapons from European NATO member states.

These three measures, if adopted by NATO, would be a formula for success in one day achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

Where are NATO's nuclear weapons?

NATO has British and US submarine based Trident nuclear weapons at their disposal if they wish. They also have US tactical nuclear weapons, for use by NATO aircraft in seven NATO member states. These are Kleine Brogel, Belgium; Buechel, Germany; Ramstein, Germany; Spangdahlem, Germany; Araxos, Greece; Aizova, Italy; Çelebi, Turkey.

² NATO Strategic Concept, agreed Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. on 23rd and 24th April 1999

It would lock three of the seven nations that possess nuclear weapons, the United States, Britain and France, into a real commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament rather than the meaningless promises that they so often make and almost as frequently break.

It would lock a powerful military, political alliance into ridding the world of nuclear weapons. Only a handful of nations still cling to a belief that nuclear weapons are essential for them to possess. Coupled with the will of the vast majority of nations who continually call for a world free of nuclear weapons this would be a voice that no nation could ignore.

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