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REPORT on WORKING GROUP 1

A new arms race and a new Cold War?

Russia, NATO, Europe, arms control treaties and missile defense

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The group covered a range of topics – from missile defense, strategies for disarmament, nuclear terrorism, the effect of globalization and networks on proliferation and arms control, nuclear weapons free zones, to arms sales in the Middle East.

Out of the discussion came proposals for three task forces:

1. on missile defense and weapons in outer space;
2. on prospects for nuclear disarmament;
3. on the feasibility of an Arctic nuclear weapon free zone.

Missile Defense

The two papers presented were highly critical of US plans to install missile defense in Europe, and in particular the installation of a radar station in the Czech Republic and ten missile interceptors in Poland. Different arguments were flagged:

1. The technology is not ready, despite the fact that the US already has spent more than 150 billion dollars on it. Many experts doubt whether a 100 % secure system, or even a quasi-100% secure system, will ever become available. Nevertheless, the US administration believes that ballistic missile defense is vital for its security. Also (potential) adversaries will start from the (worst-case) assumption that the system works.
2. The threat has not (yet) materialized. Iran and North Korea are not capable of launching intercontinental missiles with nuclear warheads. It will take a long time before they will

be capable of doing so, if ever. And if they do, what incentives do they have to launch ICBMs against the US, knowing very well that the US will retaliate ?

3. Missile defense undermines strategic stability. Russia and China do not like American missile defense. Russia is especially concerned about American missile defense systems installed near its borders. While ten interceptors do not undermine the current Russian deterrent capabilities, a more expansive defensive missile shield may do so. In reaction to these plans, Putin has already frozen Russia's participation in the CFE Treaty in July 2007. Continuing negative reactions of Russia may jeopardize further nuclear weapons reductions in the future, and therefore may be a further blow to the current nonproliferation regime, which is already in crisis.

The Russian counterproposal to use Russian-controlled radars in Azerbedjan and Asmavir has not been taken seriously by the US.

A related paper made a link between BMD and NORAD. While Canada has said "no" in the past to US invitations to participate in the ballistic missile defense system, it may end up as it actively participates within NORAD.

During the debate about missile defense, many described Russia's policy as an overreaction, both as a result of corporate interests inside Russia and as a result of political gesturing vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Some also questioned whether American missile defense could undermine the Russian nuclear deterrent, but agreed that that could be the case for China. This may lead to a build-up of the Chinese offensive arsenal, and to a new Asian arms race.

Further, it was not completely ruled out that Russia may in the end cooperate with the US in the field of missile defense. A joint information exchange system about missile launches could be set up as a first step.

Others, in contrast, provided further arguments against missile defense:

1. There may be a new kind of proliferation in the offing, namely missile defense proliferation, for instance in India, as well as an arms race in space.
2. The interception of North Korean missiles would take place above the territory of Russia.
3. How will Russia distinguish American defensive interceptors from offensive missiles flying into the direction of Russia ? This may lead to Russian authorized nuclear weapons use after false alarm.

4. The Europeans will make themselves further dependent on the US, as they were before (and still today) with regard to the nuclear weapons umbrella.

What is hopeful (from an arms control perspective) is that the US Congress recently diminished a substantial part of the funding for the American missile defense system in Europe, and that a Democratic President in 2008 would only go along on the condition that the technology is ready, and effectively tested. In all likelihood, missile defense will remain an important arms control issue in the coming years, if not decades.

Pugwash may wish to reestablish a Working Group on Problems of Missile Defense and the Prevention of Weapons in Outer Space.

Strategies of disarmament: how to change nuclear weapons policy ?

A first paper explained how the Trident decision by the Blair administration was taken, and how Pugwash UK tried to influence that decision. Pugwash pressed for an open debate, provided information to the public, invited experts, organized press briefings, and lobbied for postponing the decision to replace Trident. While initial planning for replacement submarines was approved, the issue will come back to the parliament in 3 to 4 years for a decision about funding the new system. Further input by non-UK Pugwash members is welcomed in the future.

The second paper recounted the efforts of Canadian Pugwash to change NATO's nuclear weapons policy. Senators Gen. Johnson, Gen. Dallaire, and Amb. Roche gave press conferences to publicize proposals to denuclearize NATO. In Ottawa, meetings were held with ambassadors from NATO countries.

A third paper described the arguments in favor of and against keeping American nuclear weapons in Turkey, and concluded that it was time to send them back to the US.

The debate that followed focused on the possible withdrawal of American nuclear weapons from Europe in general. There was a consensus that their presence is an anachronism, and that public opinion in Europe is very much in favor of the withdrawal. The withdrawal could also have a very positive effect on the current nonproliferation regime, at least as a symbolic gesture.

The reasons these weapons are still in Europe are due to:

1. Bureaucratic and political inertia; few politicians (except in Greece) are willing to use their political capital to change policy. There are also parochial interests involved, namely a small group within the military in the European countries, who believe that they

can have more influence in NATO with the continued presence of these weapons in their respective countries.

2. Responsibility-sharing/burden-sharing within NATO.
3. Their presence in Europe is sometimes – e.g. in a recent platform of American experts related to the Democrats - linked to Russian tactical nukes, suggesting that the withdrawal can only happen on the condition that Russia changes its tactical nuclear weapons policy as well.
4. The slippery slope argument: if NATO gives in on this issue, perhaps it will be obliged to give in on other issues in the future.
5. Uncertainty about the future.

A more general question was whether public opinion had to be involved in order to convince the government. Most of the participants (although not all) agreed that public opinion was both an important actor and stakeholder. Also the media should play a much more active role in stimulating a serious debate about these issues.

There is a proposal to set up a Pugwash Working Group (or Task Force) on nuclear disarmament. The idea of elimination is not a taboo anymore, thanks in part to the Canberra Commission, the Blix Commission, and more recently the op-ed by Schultz, Perry, Nunn and Kissinger in *The Wall Street Journal*. At the same time, there is a window of opportunity with the coming change of the US administration at the end of 2008, a new NATO Strategic Concept in 2009, and the upcoming NPT Review Conference in 2010. The next two years may be critical. It was repeatedly stressed that there was a need for a combination of vision AND concrete steps towards elimination, like the ratification of the CTBT and the withdrawal of the American nuclear weapons from Europe. A new idea was to dismantle several American and Russian nuclear weapons under the supervision of an international or IAEA inspection team.

Russia is back on the global stage

Growing Russian assertiveness in international politics could have positive consequences for arms control in the medium term. Under Putin and with the economy doing better than in the 1990's (due to rising oil and gas prices), Russia's self-confidence is increasing. Sometimes, it even behaves in a rather assertive or even aggressive way to show the rest of the world and its own public that the era of humiliation is over. Examples are the tests with ICBM's, the vacuum bomb test in 2007, and bombers flying in the direction of the West. It is clear that the Russian

military visibility and, by extension arms control, is used for geo-strategic (and domestic) reasons. The ballistic missile defense controversy should be seen in this light. The same applies to the freezing of the participation in the CFE Treaty in 2007 and the proposal to withdraw from the INF Treaty. In fact, it was suggested that Russia would like to use arms control as a way to exert political power in the international system, even going as far as playing a leading role in shaping a new international order.

Some questioned whether Russia was really back on the world stage. Others wondered what the long term vision behind this growing assertiveness was. Are we going back to a new Cold War ? Most agreed that the latter was unlikely, taking into account the power gap between the US and Russia. Even a compromise with the US on BMD was envisaged, on the condition that the Iranian threat would not materialize and the US withdraws its proposal to install MD in Eastern Europe.

Danger of nuclear terrorism

How difficult is it for terrorists to build an atomic bomb ? Not so difficult. The biggest hurdle consists of getting enough fissile material, about 100 kg of highly enriched uranium (HEU). Plutonium is the only alternative for HEU, but is much more difficult to handle, and has other disadvantages. Knowing that there is still a lot of HEU spread around the world – 1 million kg in Russia and 0.2 million kg in the US - without the necessary protection, it is time that the international community does everything it can to secure this material. The most urgent case are the nuclear research reactors, sometimes located at badly guarded universities. In addition, HEU is also used for naval purposes. HEU can be downgraded to lowly enriched uranium (LEU), which cannot be used for weapons purposes. Non-state actors are not able to enrich LEU to HEU.

The US is helping Russia in this process of conversion and securing HEU. The US paid 7-8 bn \$ for about 300 ton excess HEU, which is now used as LEU in American civilian nuclear reactors. The fact that the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (between the US and Russia) – established in 1994 - is a success, is sometimes forgotten. In principle, similar deals could be made with Russia in the future, also by other countries or entities (like the EU). However, the political climate in Russia is currently not favorable for such “soft” deals.

Towards an Arctic Nuclear Weapon Free Zone

The basic idea (from the Canadian Pugwash group) is to make a NWFZ in the Arctic region. As new sea-lanes become available due to global warming and the melting of the ice, a first step would prohibit the passage of nuclear submarines in this area. In a later stage, the Russian bases in Murmansk should be closed as well. The latter may become an option if the number of strategic nuclear weapons continues to go down to a level of 1.000 or even 500 in the future. Under that scenario, one or two legs of the triad could be scrapped. For Russia, it would be more logical to keep mobile ICBMs instead of SLBMs on submarines. There are normally not more than two nuclear strategic submarines on patrol; the others are in port, and therefore vulnerable. Nevertheless, it was admitted that the whole plan was quite ambitious because it would be the first time that nuclear weapon states were directly involved in the creation of a nuclear weapon free zone. While this ambitious plan was welcomed, many participants raised several questions: are submarines not more cost-effective than ICBMs (like the UK's decision to keep only subs) ? Can this passage of submarines be effectively controlled ? Would the Pentagon accept such intrusive verification mechanisms ? What about the political atmosphere in Russia nowadays, which is not conducive to any substantial disarmament proposal ?

On the other hand, the plans to de-alert nuclear weapons may strengthen the idea. There would at least be one bureaucratic stakeholder in favour: the Strategic Ground Forces in Russia.

A Pugwash Working Group might explore the feasibility of establishing a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Arctic Zone.

Pathways to proliferation and counterproliferation

The paper mentioned two new proliferation processes: 1) networked proliferation (e.g. Pakistan); and 2) non-state actors (see nuclear terrorism). Networked proliferation, which is a phenomenon that is understudied, has the characteristic that it is not well detectable, that complete products are delivered instead of drawing maps, and that non-state actors are the driving force. The paper also discussed the impact of globalization on proliferation. Globalization can both help proliferation as it stimulates the movement of people, information and money, and be a tool in the fight against proliferation.

UN role in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis

A recently discovered aspect of the Cuban missile crisis is the pivotal role played by the UN Secretary-General U Thant. Thanks to Thant's mediation efforts, President Kennedy had time to lower the tensions, and to imagine a solution without the use of force. In particular, Kennedy

asked Thant to contact Khrushchev and ask him to keep his ships away from Cuba in order to have more time to work out a diplomatic solution. The Soviet leader agreed to the UN request. Second, Thant proposed the dismantlement of the missiles in exchange for an American guarantee that Cuba wouldn't be invaded by the US. The latter was also accepted by both parties. Thirdly, Thant visited Castro at the end of the crisis and convinced Castro to tone down his rhetoric. This diplomatic approach was successful, and should be an example for the handling of current conflicts.

Conventional weapons sales to the Middle East

Although weapons of mass destruction are often the center of the international debate, we should not forget that wars are fought with conventional weapons. When it is discussed, the focus is most of the times on the demand side. The paper focused instead on the supply side. There are entities that have huge vested interests in selling arms. They can easily get away with the argument that "if we do not sell, other firms or states will sell exactly the same weapons". After the Cold War, this economic logic applies even more than during the Cold War when friends and enemies were chosen on the basis of ideology to fight "proxy" wars.

The consequences of this arms trade, however, are substantial. Weapons are regarded as offensive, and stimulate others to acquire arms as well. The security situation in the end may be worse than was the case before acquiring these weapons. Another paradoxical result is that states are sometimes confronted with their own weapons in the hands of the enemy.

As the Middle East is an unstable region, there is a huge demand for weapons. These weapons further destabilize the region as a result of the wars that are fought (e.g. the recent Lebanon war in 2006, the Iraq war since 2003, etc).

In the debate that followed, the aspect of security guarantees was touched upon. If states feel secure, they would have no need to acquire (so many) weapons. Is there for instance no possibility to offer security guarantees to Iran or Israel ? On the supply side, there exists already the UN Arms Register and the Wassenaar Agreement, which are just two examples of promoting transparency, which in turn may soften the security dilemma. Recently, the idea of an Arms Trade Treaty came up in the UN General Assembly, proposing that arms sales should be regulated. It was also mentioned that parliaments should take responsibility for arms exports much more than is the case today.