

***Discussion paper from four councils of churches (World Council of Churches,
Conference of European Churches, National Council of Churches of Christ
in the USA, Canadian Council of Churches) on the issue of
tactical nuclear weapons of the Russian Federation***

1. Introduction

In January 2007, in an opinion-editorial in the Wall Street Journal, four former statesmen in the U.S. called for reaching the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Over the ensuing months and years, eminent citizens and civil society organizations in many countries made similar calls. The new momentum towards nuclear disarmament includes many churches and ecumenical organizations. One of its expressions has been a cooperative initiative by four ecumenical Councils which have long advocated for the elimination of nuclear weapons: the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. (NCCUSA) and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC).

In the joint actions of our four Councils, with some 200 member churches in Europe and North America, we have primarily focused on the continued presence of 150 to 200 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in five European NATO member states. We have argued that, although these arsenals are much smaller than they were in the past, their complete withdrawal is long overdue and would reduce the number of countries in the world with nuclear weapons on their territory from the current 14 to nine. TNW withdrawal would be a significant contribution by NATO to international nuclear arms controls. Moreover, all doubts about compliance with Article I and II of the NPT, prohibiting any transfer of nuclear weapons, would end. And other countries would be denied the use of a deterrence rationale similar to NATO's justifying the deployment of their own nuclear weapons on the territory of non-nuclear weapons states. Today, the U.S. is the only country in the world doing so.

In three letters to NATO we have addressed NATO's policy of 'nuclear sharing'. This has resulted in several meetings in Brussels with NATO officials. In these letters and meetings, we have strongly advocated the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe without NATO making such a step dependent on Russian reciprocity. We have also argued for the Russian Federation to make similar changes in its TNW deployments, without making them conditional on NATO decisions.

In this discussion paper, we now want to address the issue of Russian TNW and ways in which the Russian Federation could give a convincing signal of its willingness to contribute to a world without nuclear weapons. We offer these thoughts in the hope for discussions with officials of the Russian Federation.

This paper is also being shared with member churches and partners in Russia and with our ecumenical constituency at large. There is long-standing concern and engagement for peace on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church. Recent examples include a plenary presentation at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Jamaica (May 2011), an ecumenical expert seminar in Brussels (July 2011) and other meetings.

2. Our three joint letters to NATO, to the EU and to Presidents Obama and Medvedev

In three joint letters, our four Councils have asked NATO to express a clear commitment to a world without nuclear weapons and for steps to make good on that commitment, especially the removal of all remaining U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe.

- Our first letter to NATO on this topic was sent 30 March 2009, just before NATO's 60th anniversary, as NATO began revising its Strategic Concept.
- Our next joint letter to NATO, dated 28 October 2009, was also addressed to the leaders of the European Union, the U.S. and the Russian Federation. Again, we asked NATO to end its policy of 'nuclear sharing' and eliminate its nuclear weapons now stored in Europe. We also asked the EU to endorse the new call for a nuclear weapon free world in its Common Position for the 2010 NPT review Conference. And we asked the Russian Federation to address its vast number of TNW and resume the 1991/92 process of unilateral reductions by both the U.S. and the Soviet Union/Russia (the so called Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, or PNI's).
- In our third and most recent letter to NATO, dated 11 March 2011, we expressed our disappointment about NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted in November 2010. Again, we stressed how withdrawing all U.S. TNW from Europe would contribute to strengthening the non-proliferation regime. We made five recommendations to NATO for the Defense and Deterrence Posture Review it has decided to undertake in 2011-12, again including the proposal that NATO should de-link its decisions from the policies of Russia to avoid becoming tied to very lengthy and complicated negotiations.

This third letter to NATO was also addressed to the Presidents of the U.S. and of the Russian Federation. We again urged Russia to reduce and relocate its TNW -- without making NATO withdrawals a precondition -- adding that such confidence-building measures would also address the concerns of some of Russia's neighboring states. And we urged both NATO and Russia to be fully transparent about numbers and locations of their TNW. A copy of this letter is attached to the current discussion paper.

3. Russian commitments to a world without nuclear weapons

Considering the long history of our four Councils of advocating for nuclear disarmament, we strongly welcomed the joint commitment to a world without nuclear weapons made by Presidents Obama and Medvedev on 1 April 2009 in London. In particular we were encouraged by the following statement:

"As leaders of the two largest nuclear weapons states, we agreed to work together to fulfill our obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and demonstrate leadership in reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world. We committed our two countries to achieving a nuclear free world..."

Both President Medvedev and President Obama have reaffirmed this commitment on several occasions. The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2010 spoke of "*consistent movement towards a world free from nuclear weapons.*"

In further discussing what this might entail, we believe that four points merit special attention: a) Russian conditions for reducing and eventually eliminating its TNW, b) the issue of transparency in

numbers and locations, c) NPT obligations and the role of TNW in security strategies, and d) the need for a new European security concept.

4. Russian conditions

We are aware of the Russian position that Russian TNW can only be discussed after the U.S. has withdrawn all of its nuclear weapons to its own territory. We welcome that Russia, after the end of the Cold War, has ended the deployment of nuclear weapons in other countries. Today, the U.S. is the only country that has not given up this posture. As our letters to NATO and also our discussions with NATO officials testify, our Councils, together with member churches and partner organizations, are putting much effort into ending this situation.

NATO's new *Strategic Concept* did not establish a formal linkage between future reductions by NATO and parallel steps by Russia.¹ However, in political terms a linkage was there, which has been strengthened by subsequent developments. Most – but not all - NATO countries see Russian steps as a pre-condition for changing NATO's policy and posture. Moreover, at the time of the entry into force of the New START Treaty the U.S. committed itself to seek to initiate negotiations about the disparity in numbers. Of course, we are not opposed to negotiations as such, but our concern is that they might unnecessarily prolong postures that are remnants of the Cold War and have lost any rationale for today. And many observers doubt that even a beginning with new negotiations could be made before 2013 (due to the U.S. elections in 2012).

Some Russian officials have stated that it is too early to discuss limiting TNW, because Russia first needs to see if the U.S. fulfills its New START commitments. In our view, this may not only further postpone urgent steps and result in a dead-lock but could also become an added incentive for the U.S. and NATO to make modernization decisions as to aircraft and nuclear bombs. In turn, this could stimulate modernization of aging Russian systems. Such a dead-lock might be avoided by taking the example of the 1991-92 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives mentioned above, which represented a non-negotiated form of disarmament, - in fact the most significant nuclear disarmament process in history. Therefore, we would like to discuss the options for Russian measures outside the context of formal negotiations, and in this way also encourage NATO in its own debates over the process of withdrawal.²

We are aware that issues like missile defense, Prompt Global Strike, the militarization of space, and the difficulties with CFE are complicating factors. They create a sense of uncertainty about longer term intentions and developments. However, we also believe that first steps as to Russia's TNW in no way will affect Russia's security. On the contrary, they may contribute to discussing these other issues in a more constructive way.

¹ Instead NATO said its "aim" would be "to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on its nuclear weapons in Europe and relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members. Any further steps must take into account the disparity with the greater Russian stockpiles of short-range nuclear weapons."

² One of our partner organizations is the Dutch ecumenical peace organization IKV Pax Christi. After interviewing the delegations in Brussels of all 28 NATO member states, it has published a report on the future of NATO TNW in Europe called *Withdrawal Issues* (March 2011). It concluded that there is sufficient political will within NATO to end the deployment of U.S. TNW in Europe, as 14 of NATO's 28 member states support such a step and 10 others will not block a consensus decision to that end. However, conditions vary, and the absence of some form of Russian reciprocity would be a major obstacle.

5. Transparency in numbers and locations

Transparency is another concern. Representatives of our Councils were present when, in May 2010 at the NPT Review Conference in New York, the Russian delegation presented figures about the reductions of Russian nuclear arsenals. We welcomed the detailed figures about Russia's implementations of the INF Treaty, the START Treaty and the SORT Treaty. However, we were disappointed that apparently this transparency did not equally apply to Russian TNW. No figures were given, only the information that as a result of the 1991/92 PNI's they were reduced by 75%. It seems reasonable to offer a level of transparency commensurate with the U.S. and UK results reported in May 2010.

Transparency also applies to locations. This could alleviate some of the concerns of some of Russia's neighboring states. We suggest that openness about this could be an important confidence building measure. Locations of U.S. TNW in Europe are known from open sources.

6. TNW and security strategies

All nuclear weapon states that are parties to the NPT (and also all non-nuclear NPT states that take part in 'extended deterrence', both in Europe and Asia) have committed themselves to fulfill the NPT obligation *"to further diminish the role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies."* (NPT RevCon 2010, Action 5.c *'Conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions'*). Obviously, this also applies to the Russian Federation. Our Councils would like to encourage both NATO and the Russian Federation to be open to discussing the consequences of these NPT obligations for their respective security doctrines with regard to *both* strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons. (We remind of the fact that this NPT obligation does not speak of any precondition of reciprocity).

In Russia's new Military Doctrine (2010) the emphasis seems to be on strategic deterrence. However, many experts including some Russian analysts argue that the role of Russian TNW is unclear. It seems to us that the forthcoming NPT PrepCom in May 2012 in Vienna would provide an opportunity for all relevant parties to report about the progress made.

7. A new European security concept

A nuclear-weapon-free world is both possible and necessary. The road will not be easy and we are aware that a nuclear-weapon-free world will not simply be today's world minus nuclear weapons. We believe that some significant steps in this direction could already be made on short notice in Europe.

We believe it is in the interest of all countries in Europe, including the Russian Federation, that a new security concept is developed for Europe. There is a strange contradiction in current policies. The Cold War legacy remains when considering security issues, while economically these previous enemies are now so interdependent that conflict is almost unimaginable. Obviously, a changing world will face new threats. We believe that these threats are not met by Cold War thinking and Cold War hardware. By clinging to such remnants, both NATO and Russia are hindered in their capacity to respond to emerging security concerns. As church organizations we feel a responsibility for reconciliation on this continent that in the past 100 years has suffered so much from wars: two world wars, many regional wars, civil wars, and the Cold War. We believe it is our task to engage our constituency in discussions about Europe's future.

Therefore, the new discussion about a nuclear-weapon-free world cannot be isolated from the wider context of security issues today and in the future. We reiterate that issues such as missile defense, Prompt Global Strike, the militarization of space and the future of the CFE Treaty are part of the discussion and we are aware that in some fields like missile defense solutions may be difficult to find. However, we also believe that this wider discussion on European security, whatever its direction and results, will no longer see any role for Cold War TNW in Europe. Their reduction and eventual elimination may help free the way for discussing the real problems this continent faces and contribute to a new trust among former enemies, both in Europe and in North America.

We are grateful that the fear of a devastating nuclear and conventional war between 'East' and 'West' is left to the past. The time has come to develop a 'sense of community' that can be the basis of a new Euro-Atlantic security community. We recall the joint statement of the NATO-Russia Council in November 2010, in which NATO member states and Russia, as equal partners, committed themselves to "*work towards achieving a true strategic and modernized partnership based on the principles of reciprocal confidence, transparency, and predictability, with the aim of contributing to the creation of a common space of peace, security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.*"

8. Conclusion

We consider it an anachronism that, two decades after the end of the Cold War, TNW are still deployed in Europe, both by NATO and by Russia. That TNW were formerly called 'battlefield nuclear weapons' is a reminder that they are remnants of defense and deterrence strategies that have lost their rationale. They pose safety and security risks. Their withdrawal and elimination would strengthen the non-proliferation regime and reduce the risks that nuclear weapons pose to humanity and to our planet.

There is currently a danger that the new political dynamics toward a world free of nuclear weapons may lose its momentum. Obviously, issues like a Middle East free of WMD, strengthening the security of nuclear materials, dealing with the emergence of (potential) new nuclear weapon states, etc., will require long-term processes. However, as further steps ending the Cold War posture of TNW could be realized on relatively short notice, both on the part of NATO and of the Russian Federation, they could be quite timely for revitalizing the process towards a nuclear weapon free world that started five years ago. Churches and ecumenical organizations consider it part of their responsibility towards God, towards all of humankind and towards Creation to remain committed to this process.

We look forward to discussing these matters in more detail directly with officials of the Russian Federation. We also trust that this discussion paper can serve for reflection and dialogue within our constituency in the context of the broader ecumenical debate on security in Europe.

World Council of Churches
Conference of European Churches
National Council of Churches in the U.S.A.
Canadian Council of Churches

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Attachment: [11 March 2011 letter to NATO Secretary General, US President and Russian Federation President from four ecumenical councils](#)