

Nuclear Disarmament at an Impasse

Sunday, 03 June 2012 *By Jean Marie Muller, Truthout / News Analysis*

While the session of the preparatory committee of the review conference of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), which took place in Vienna in May of 2012, failed, the NATO summit, which just took place in Chicago on 20 and 21 of May 2012, was a real "success." In Vienna, countries armed with nuclear weapons clearly expressed their refusal to commit themselves in a process of nuclear disarmament; in Chicago, the 28 heads of state of the member countries of the Atlantic Alliance decided to commit themselves even more in the nuclear militarization of international diplomacy. The failure of the meeting on disarmament and the "success" of the meeting on armament are based on the same exact logic. Taken together, they render the clauses of the NPT on disarmament and nonproliferation obsolete.

In Vienna, beyond the window dressings of their good intentions in favor of the three objectives of the NPT - nuclear disarmament, nuclear nonproliferation and access to civil uses of nuclear energy - every armed member state maintained that they intended to maintain their doctrine of nuclear dissuasion to assure the security of their country. It is in this context that China's representative admitted that his country is determined to keep its nuclear arsenal: "China," he said, "is strongly in favor of a nuclear strategy of legitimate defense and will continue to maintain its nuclear capacities at the minimum level required by national security."

Jo Adamson, the ambassador to the United Kingdom, at the conference on disarmament, declared, "As long as nuclear arsenals remain and the risk of nuclear proliferation persists, the United Kingdom will maintain that only a credible nuclear capacity can bring the necessary, ultimate guarantee to our national security. This is why the government of the United Kingdom has committed itself to maintaining a minimal nuclear dissuasion, leading to the renewal of the Trident missile and the replacement of its submarine program."

Antonio Guerreiro, the head of the Brazilian delegation, challenged the pertinence of the omissions armed states were offering one another by focusing on armament reduction. "It is simply unacceptable," he declared, "that twenty years after the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons still continue to play an integral role in the doctrines of military security." Then, he explained that armed states use every false pretext possible in order to perpetuate and legitimize their nuclear arsenals and refuse to commit themselves to the path of nuclear disarmament. He continued, "To wait for a Kantian universal and perpetual peace in order to begin renouncing atomic weapons simply goes counter to the ultimate objective of the NPT - which is the total and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons."

The representative from Brazil concluded by highlighting that, today, there is no longer an enemy to dissuade, and that there has never been a more propitious moment for putting an end to the current "addiction to nuclear weapons." In vain he added that this addiction is irrational - that is, after all, the feature of every addiction - everyone knows that nothing is more difficult than healing and freeing oneself from an addiction. It's even more difficult precisely because they are irrational.

At the Chicago Summit, the heads of state and government declared on 20 of May, 2012: "Nuclear weapons are an essential component of NATO's global capacities for defense and dissuasion.... As long as there are nuclear weapons, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.... The Allies will ensure that all of the elements composing the nuclear dissuasion of NATO will remain safe, secure and effective as long as the Alliance will remain a nuclear Alliance."

Such statements are a continual source of amazement. Would it not be fitting to reverse the argument and say: As long as NATO remains a nuclear alliance, there will be nuclear weapons? And as long as nuclear weapons remain an essential component of NATO's global capacities of dissuasion and defense, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. The allies of NATO are sealing themselves off in a vicious circle of their own nuclear proliferation without giving one another even the least possibility of escape.

One of the major decisions of the Chicago Summit was to deploy an anti-missile shield in Europe by offering the objective to reinforce the security of the populations of member states of the Atlantic Alliance. "The antimissile defense may complete the role of nuclear weapons, but it cannot substitute for it." In truth, it is legitimate to doubt this. Concerning the complementarity between dissuasion and anti-missile defense, it is well stated in the final document, but it is pure rhetoric. It is necessary to admit that installation of an anti-missile shield supposes the failure of dissuasion and this is not without its problems in regard to even the doctrine of dissuasion defined by countries armed with nuclear weapons.

By submitting to the United States, Europeans have accepted American nuclear militarization of the European commons. This is a major political fault. A true resignation. American nuclear strategy imposed by the United States concretizes the failure of the NPT concerning its two main objectives: nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. This failure could be definitive.

(Translated into English by Stephanie Van Hook. She is the executive director of the Metta Center for Nonviolence.)