



**Open-ended Working Group taking forward
multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations¹****Geneva 2016**

Item 5(b) of the agenda

**Taking forward multilateral nuclear
disarmament negotiations: recommendations
on other measures that could contribute to
taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations****The role of nuclear alliance states in taking forward
multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations****Submitted by Wildfire****I. Introduction**

1. Efforts to date to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations have focused on the role of nuclear-armed states, and in particular on the role of the five nuclear-weapon states parties to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). For example, the disarmament part of the 64-point Action Plan agreed at the 2010 review conference of the NPT² lists a number of specific actions to be taken by nuclear-weapon states. Given that it is the states that possess nuclear weapons that will ultimately have to disarm, this focus is to a large extent natural and logical.

2. There is, however, another group of states that have a direct stake in the existence and disposition of nuclear arsenals, and therefore potential influence over their future. These are the states that are non-nuclear-weapon states parties to the NPT, but which are in a nuclear alliance with one or more nuclear-weapon states, and therefore depend to some extent on nuclear weapons for their security and defence. These states include the non-nuclear-weapon states that are members of NATO, along with a number of other states that have bilateral alliance relationships with a nuclear-weapon state.

3. Nuclear alliance states have been criticized, both by other states and by civil society organizations, for the apparent double standard and possible conflict of interest involved in supporting nuclear disarmament while benefiting from the protection of nuclear weapons. It

¹ Established pursuant to resolution 70/33 of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

² NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I), part I

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is not the purpose of this working paper to criticize nuclear alliance states or to question their sovereign decisions on national security. Rather, this paper works from the assumption that nuclear alliance states are genuine in their commitment to implementing the NPT and pursuing nuclear disarmament. It examines the role that these states might constructively play in taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, and makes some specific recommendations.

II. Implications and effects of reliance on nuclear weapons held by others

4. There are a number of implications of the reliance by non-nuclear-weapon states on the nuclear weapons of nuclear-weapon states that may directly or indirectly affect prospects for taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, and nuclear disarmament in general. These include:

(a) **Asymmetry of interest and control:** the security interests of nuclear alliance states are vested in deterrence provided by weapons that they do not own and do not control. This makes the role of nuclear alliance states problematic in any prospective nuclear disarmament negotiation: they are not able to negotiate on their own behalf over the full range of their national interests. In addition, there is always a risk that the deterrence “cover” may be withdrawn for one reason or another, notwithstanding the provisions of the treaties or other agreements that govern the alliance. This lack of control and perceived vulnerability may lead to nuclear alliance states tending to be more conservative than nuclear-weapon states in entering into potential nuclear disarmament commitments.

(b) **External constraints on nuclear-weapon States:** conversely, security and “extended deterrence” commitments given by nuclear-weapon states to their nuclear alliance partners may impede the ability and willingness of nuclear-weapon states to enter into nuclear disarmament commitments or to pursue unilateral measures that favour disarmament. In cases where alliance partners feel acutely threatened by regional security developments, this constraint on the freedom of action of nuclear-weapon states can be severe.

(c) **Alliance policy coordination:** just as a convoy moves at the speed of the slowest ship, a nuclear alliance could be said to move towards nuclear disarmament at the rate of the most vulnerable or reluctant member. Even if some members of a nuclear alliance are ready to consider more ambitious steps to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, they are unable to do so unless the rest of the alliance membership agrees. In addition, agreed alliance positions (such as NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept, which states that “as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance”) provide a convenient shelter for governments wishing to avoid confronting the difficult choices necessary to make progress with nuclear disarmament. Each government can avow its own commitment to disarmament, while regretting that the agreed alliance policy does not allow movement for now.

(d) **Legal ambiguity:** nuclear alliances are not mentioned in the NPT, and the controversial practice of nuclear sharing (where nuclear weapons belonging to a nuclear-weapon state member of the alliance are based on the territory of non-nuclear-weapon state members) is not explicitly prohibited by the treaty (some NPT states parties argue that it is implicitly prohibited; others argue it is permitted). But regardless of the range of opinion on the nuclear sharing issue, it is clear that a situation where a state that is prohibited from acquiring nuclear weapons relies on such weapons as part of its official defence doctrine carries highly problematic potential legal implications. For example, the negotiation of a more comprehensive treaty totally prohibiting nuclear weapons would pose an awkward legal dilemma for NPT non-nuclear-weapon states in nuclear alliances. The unappealing prospect of having to untangle and resolve such a dilemma may be a significant factor

contributing to the reluctance of nuclear alliance states to support efforts to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

(e) **Trust and influence with nuclear-weapon States:** on the positive side, because of their close security cooperation and the level of trust involved in maintaining a shared nuclear deterrent, nuclear alliance states can be expected to have a much greater level of influence than other non-nuclear-weapon states over the policy of nuclear-weapon states with respect to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. This factor is often pointed out by nuclear alliance states themselves, who highlight their potential role as “bridge builders” with the nuclear-weapon states.

III. Recommendations

5. Given these interrelated implications and effects, positive and negative, there are a number of specific steps that nuclear alliance states could take to ameliorate the negative factors and magnify the positive, in the interest of taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations and improving overall prospects for progress on nuclear disarmament. The Open-ended Working Group should therefore recommend that nuclear alliance states:

(a) Initiate national discussions – in both government and academic settings – on possible practical and realistic steps that could be taken independently or in cooperation with alliance partners to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security strategies and military doctrines. Such an action would be in line with NPT review conference decisions and with recommendations of the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), as well as with the specific recommendation made at this working group by a number of nuclear alliance states to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines” (A/AC.286/WP.9, paragraph 10 (d)).

(b) Initiate discussions with alliance partners on the specific steps that will be needed to manage the transition from a nuclear alliance to a non-nuclear alliance, as and when the global legal regime evolves.

(c) Review national policy and diplomatic practice to ensure they are not impeding the ability or willingness of their nuclear-weapon state alliance partner(s) to take further steps towards nuclear disarmament.

(d) Provide transparency reports on any nuclear weapons based on their territory under nuclear sharing arrangements, as a practical means of demonstrating commitment to NPT implementation, and possibly as a pilot program for wider transparency reporting from nuclear-weapon states as mandated by NPT review conferences. Such reporting would be in accordance with the specific recommendation made at this working group by a number of nuclear alliance states to increase transparency measures (A/AC.286/WP.9, paragraph 9 (a)).

(e) Initiate national discussions – in both government and academic settings – to consider the implications of a comprehensive legal prohibition of nuclear weapons, examine means of resolving consequent legal issues that might arise, and develop policy for constructively engaging with the development of such a prohibition and supporting its implementation.

(f) Report regularly on progress with all of the above to meetings of the NPT, the Conference on Disarmament, and other appropriate forums.