

## **Stop the nuclear MADness**

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There is a growing consensus that we must address climate issues if we are to save the planet. We know how important it is to take on this challenge. But there's also this other planetary threat that, with enough political will and common sense, could be eradicated fairly easily: Nuclear weapons. Like climate, the elimination of nuclear weapons must be a global political priority. More than 12,000 nuclear weapons are deployed worldwide. In the context of increasing economic and geostrategic competition among the major powers, nuclear weapons are once again playing a dangerously important role.

A few days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, President Vladimir Putin announced that he had ordered nuclear weapons to be placed on 'special alert' status. Russia has a large arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons that are designed to be used on the battlefield, against troops or military installations.

Regardless of whether president Putin is playing bluff poker and the risk of nuclear war has actually increased, his multiple nuclear threats are an illustration of how dependent we are on the whims of a small group of rulers, their missteps, miscalculations and emotions in times of crisis. In the summer of 2017, president Trump also threatened to launch a nuclear attack to "completely destroy North Korea". These threats are confirmations of the weaknesses of the idea of 'deterrence' attached to most nuclear doctrines. Deterrence is based on the concept of 'Mutual Assured Destruction' often referred to by the acronym MAD. But it is not only an acronym. Nuclear arms are MADness. Nevertheless deterrence was and still remains the main argument in the US/NATO doctrine for maintaining and upgrading nuclear arsenals.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, their use is possible. Since the horrific attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, humanity has escaped nuclear war or accidental deployment of nuclear weapons dozens of times. Before fortune fails us, we must get rid of these planet-threatening weapons of mass destruction!

The various nuclear threats from Moscow are irresponsible and must be condemned. But they also make it clear that the war must not escalate further. They show the importance of diplomacy, of serious negotiations. Europe must not go along with the US military strategy aimed at weakening Russia. A wounded animal can strike unexpectedly.

The war is causing tremendous human suffering. But it is also used by the military industrial complex to militarise Europe to levels unimaginable just a few months ago. Military budgets are skyrocketing. NATO was last year responsible for more than half of world wide military spending, 17 times more than Russia. Soon it will be may be 25 times Russia's military spending. So, let us have no illusions. The militarisation is not intended to serve our security

or to defend us, but to prepare and expand hegemonic combat, with what NATO calls systemic rivals.

The new arms race has also a nuclear component. The United Kingdom announced in March 2021, that it will expand its arsenal to 260 nuclear warheads. France conducted tests of new nuclear-capable air-to-surface missiles in March of this year. The US will also deploy new nuclear B 61-12 bombs at the British base in Lakenheath to make the UK part of NATO's nuclear sharing policy. Poland, too, has already made it known that it wants to deploy nuclear weapons if asked so. NATO's expansion to include Finland and Sweden or the deployment of nuclear weapons in Poland could lead to new Russian nuclear weapons being deployed in the Baltic Sea area.

Already, in spring this year, Belarus has lifted its nuclear-weapon-free zone status and threatened that it may well open its territory to new nuclear weapons from Russia. End of June this year, Russia announced it will provide nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles to Belarus and upgrade the country's fighter jets to allow them to carry tactical atomic weapons. The move is apparently intended to mirror nuclear sharing arrangements the United States has with five NATO allies — Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Turkey.

That nuclear weapons are regaining prominence in military strategies is reflected in the fact - according to a new ICAN report - that the nine nuclear-weapon states invested \$82.4 billion in their nuclear arsenals last year, \$6.5 billion more than the year before. The United States accounted for more than half of that.

If the UK joins the NATO nuclear sharing countries there will be six of them. The US atomic bombs in today's countries will be replaced by new B61-12 bombs in the coming years. These nuclear bombs are equipped with an electronic tail kit that can guide the bomb to its target. They have also lower yield options. The mixture of both, precision and lower yield options make them very dangerous. They could be seen by war planners as more 'useable'. In none of these countries the parliaments have authorized the deployment of nuclear bombs more than half a century ago. Officially, we are not allowed to know that these nuclear weapons exist in our countries. The deployment of new B61-12 bombs is happening in secret, without any parliamentary or public debate or approval. However, they endanger the population because the NATO "nuclear sharing" countries can be the first target of a nuclear attack.

Moreover, our countries are complicit in the organization of a nuclear war. After all, it is Belgian, German, Italian and Dutch fighter planes that have to use these nuclear bombs in war time as part of NATO's nuclear sharing. Every fall, these NATO member states practice the use of nuclear weapons in "Steadfast Noon" manoeuvres.

The new B61-12 bombs will increase the danger of a war with nuclear weapons eroding the concept of 'deterrence' even more. So it is MADness that we'll have to stop.

In every crisis there is an opportunity. The recent nuclear threats may set people in motion for nuclear disarmament and pressure those in power. According to several opinion polls,

the European population is opposed to nuclear weapons in Europe. It's the challenge for the peace movement to rebuild the large anti nuclear movement of the '80s when many hundreds of people took the streets. We have international law on our side. As of January 2021, the treaty banning nuclear weapons (TPNW) entered into force. The treaty is complementary to the NPT, which is both to stop the further spread of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear weapon states and that puts an obligation on the part of Nuclear Weapon States for nuclear disarmament. At the meeting, for the first time, there was a small symbolic breach in nuclear solidarity. Under pressure from the peace movement, Norway, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands participated at the meeting of state parties of the TPNW in Vienna, last June, despite pressure from NATO and the United States. NATO and member state governments claim falsely that the TPNW is incompatible with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and that it even undermines it. It is important to recall that a key motivation of the states that negotiated the TPNW was to take forward the implementation of the nuclear disarmament obligations of article VI of the NPT. The real reason is that NATO sees the treaty as a threat to the organisation's political unity over its nuclear strategy. According to NATO: "Nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence, alongside conventional and missile defence forces. NATO is committed to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, but as long as nuclear weapons exist, it will remain a nuclear alliance."

However, NATO only defined itself as a 'nuclear alliance' since the NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010.

Europe's political world needs to reflect on lessons learned. One of these lessons should be that we need to get rid of the threat of a nuclear armageddon. As Nobel Peace Laureate Oscar Arias, former President of Costa Rica proposed, NATO could even use the removal of nuclear weapons in the European sharing countries as a bargaining chip to get president Putin on the negotiation table to end the war in Ukraine.

That's why we as a peace movement should insist that the re-establishment of a constructive political environment is needed in which negotiations towards European nuclear disarmament are possible for all nuclear weapon systems in Europe. This is achievable if Europe rebuilds relations with Russia, based on mutual respect for each other's security interests and confidential building measures. Common indivisible security and disarmament is the path towards a peaceful and secure future. Europe should become a nuclear weapon free zone as soon as possible, which could be a next step towards a nuclear weapon free world!!!