



## Comment:

# Dutch call for an end to the deployment of US Tactical Nuclear Weapons grows louder

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*Promoting a more transparent and accountable NATO*

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There is little confidence that the NATO Defence and Deterrence Posture Review (DDPR) will deal with the divisive issue of the deployment of US nuclear weapons in five non-nuclear weapon states in Europe. Word on the Brussels streets is that the DDPR will – at best – entail a proposal to Russia to talk about transparency on numbers and locations of both the Russian and US tactical nuclear stockpiles. More than this watered down consensus is apparently impossible, because a few countries are blocking reduction of numbers, relocation to the US or the end of nuclear sharing altogether.



That said, the April 12 debate on NATO in the Dutch parliament raises the question as to how relevant the DDPR formulation really is for US nuclear weapons deployed in Europe. As Dutch political parties are starting to realise that NATO is again failing to address their concerns, they also realise that the 'rule' of consensus decision making within NATO on such matters is not a formal requirement. Some of them have started to call for a fixed date to end the deployment of B61 tactical nuclear weapons, and to go around NATO-consensus if necessary. Since then, the government has fallen and the group of parties taking this new, no-nonsense approach to the deployment of military redundant nuclear weapons in non-nuclear weapon states is expected to do well in the coming elections. A DDPR failing to go beyond the expected watered down consensus may be ripe for the trash can as early as October 2012.

IKV Pax Christi released a [report](#) in April arguing that changing or ending the deployment of nuclear weapons does not require NATO consensus. Recent experiences, where the US withdrew

nuclear weapons from Greece and the UK showed that NATO consensus decision making did not play a significant part in the run up to the decision. The decisions were basically taken bilaterally. Indeed, there are no formal NATO rules or regulations that can prevent the US and host countries from together deciding to reduce numbers or end deployments. The current mantra

'only consensus decisions can change the future of nuclear sharing and deployments' is a political choice, not a formal rule.

(no consensus – photo credit: JK/flickr)

The idea that nuclear deployments can only be changed through NATO consensus is relatively new. And could be very short lived. In the

Netherlands, the debate among political parties is no longer whether or not the bombs need to go. The debate is on the question as to whether NATO should be allowed yet another chance to deal with the issue internally, or whether the Netherlands should proceed to do what is within its formal power: Approach the US and bilaterally negotiate the withdrawal of the roughly 20 US B61 dial-a-yeild nuclear gravity bombs at Volkel Airbase in the municipality of Uden. NATO allies can put pressure on the Netherlands not to break free from consensus decision making. But at the end of the day, there is nothing they can do if the Netherlands decides that enough is enough, the weapons have to go.

The April 12 parliamentary hearing showed that a growing number of political parties in the Netherlands will no longer accept the NATO logic that France, Hungary, Lithuania and perhaps one or two others can indefinitely block the removal of weapons that are clearly redundant. They want the weapons out and they want to deal with the issue now – before the Dutch have to start investing in the modernisation of the bombs and

the infrastructure, and for the purchase of new dual capable aircraft to replace the ageing F-16s that this non-nuclear weapon state now uses to be able to fly nuclear weapons around.

The Labour Party (PvdA) during the hearing clearly repositioned itself on the issue, saying that *those weapons have lost every military relevance. For a political meaning they do not have to be on Dutch soil. My party wants to see these weapons removed, if necessary though bilateral decisions\**

The Socialist Party (which is expected to become the largest progressive party) stressed that

*we propose to make it clear to NATO Allies that the government will bilaterally negotiate with the U.S. the removal of nuclear weapons if the Alliance cannot reach a consensus on the removal of these weapons within a set timeframe. To encourage this, we can perhaps declare that at a certain date, determined by the Netherlands, the F16s will no longer be available for the nuclear task and that the infrastructure that is now being maintained for that purpose, including the training of pilots, will be removed from the Defence budgets.*

The smaller GreenLeft party stated in the debate that

*the presence of nuclear weapons on Dutch soil and in Belgium, Germany, Italy and Turkey should [...] no longer be made dependent on negotiations between the U.S. and Russia. [...] why don't we discuss this bilaterally with the U.S., just like the UK and Greece have done? [...] We are not going to modernise [the B61 bombs], we'll take them out of the Netherlands before 2017.*

Libertarian party D66 added to the upbeat atmosphere by stating that

*about nuclear disarmament we only have one thing to say: My party supports the end of the Dutch nuclear task, as we've said time and time again.*

There is no 'other side' in this debate advocating NATO's nuclear status quo. The Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Liberal Party (VVD) who together made up the minority government have both indicated they support the removal of the nuclear bombs, but preferably through a NATO consensus decision. Their government collapsed though, 10 days after the above-mentioned parliamentary debate.

Current polls show that the parties who are advocating strongly for the early termination of B61 deployments in the Netherlands, would draw a majority of votes.

NATO's reason to only allow change through consensus decision making has been that, above all, the Alliance needs to demonstrate political unity. But if, after two years of consultations and discussions, NATO's DDPR propagates a policy that lacks the support of key players such as the host states, the show of political unity may last barely beyond 'Chicago'. A Dutch no-nonsense government solving this tired issue bilaterally with the US may be in charge in the Hague as early as October 2012.

It is late, but not too late for NATO to realize that it needs to give more space for the formal decision making prerogatives of host states if it wants to maintain real political unity. A decision to relocate the B61s back to the US within a short time period and a timeframe for ending the current nuclear sharing practices is the only way NATO will really overcome the divisive effects of US nuclear deployments in non-nuclear weapon countries in Europe.

\*Note: All citations are the authors own translations from Dutch. Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal (2012): *Concept Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg over: NAVO Ministersbijeenkomst*

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