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Fifth follow-up:¹ Toward A Nuclear Weapon Free World

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This autumn has marked the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the UN Climate Change Conference, last month in Copenhagen. The first represents the end of the Cold War; the second a multi-polar world with "common but differentiated responsibilities".

¹ This follow-up is the fifth in a series of articles focused on the Nuclear agenda in International Relations published by the Clingendael International Energy Programme (CIEP) at <http://www.clingendael.nl/ciep/publications/briefing-papers>. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Clingendael International Energy Programme,

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President Obama has been in office for a year. Since his inauguration, he has repeatedly stated that he considers a world without nuclear weapons to be necessary. Together with his Russian counterpart Dimitri Medvedev, he affirmed this in a statement in London last April. Four days later in Prague, Obama gave what has already become a historic speech, in which he called for a nuclear-weapon-free world and acknowledged the moral responsibility of the United States to take the lead in nuclear disarmament. Obama's initiative at the UN Security Council in September 2009, where again he committed himself to the elimination of nuclear weapons, was another highly significant step. On this occasion, he also honored the four American security policy veterans (Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, George Shultz and William Perry) who, in a January 2007 opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal, broke with the Cold War logic of deterrence. Looking back, this article was an essential turning point in the global debate on nuclear weapons. This celebrated initiative by the American 'Group of Four' was followed by similar initiatives in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Norway and Poland. Two well-known names in this movement are Helmut Schmidt and Douglas Hurd. From the moment he took office, President Obama has joined their plea and thereby implicitly expressed a generally positive view of the 'Global Zero' movement, which was initiated in 2008 in the United States.

It is of critical importance that the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, to be held in May 2010, will be successful. This is why we believe that the Netherlands should explicitly express its support for the goal of a nuclear-free world, newly stated by President Obama. Our support is necessary because thus far neither NATO nor the EU have done so. In our view, the Netherlands should not be too modest. We are one of the 'founding fathers' of what now is the European Union. We were at the foundation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). From day one we have been party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). And we have a special nuclear record, both with regard to the peaceful use of nuclear technology (Urenco) and our participation in the nuclear tasks of NATO.

It is impossible to do away with the existing knowledge of nuclear technology. However, at the present time, it is both possible and important to use it responsibly. The Cold War is truly over; it ended twenty years ago. A nuclear arsenal to restrain superpowers is no longer needed. In combating terrorism, deterrence with weapons of mass destruction has no purpose. Let us be clear, not only did nuclear weapons give shape to the Cold War, the Cold War also shaped the control of nuclear weapons; and that reality has definitely come to an end. This is the main reason why the existence of nuclear weapons has become much more dangerous than before.

Reductions in and the eventual abolishment of nuclear weapons were codified in the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968. However, the nuclear weapon states have interpreted Article VI in such a way that they have fulfilled their obligations only by reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly difficult to explain why some countries should and others should not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons. Of course, the abolition of nuclear weapons will take time. The primary responsibility lies with the two nuclear weapon states that have the largest arsenals: the United States and Russia. Presidents Obama and Medvedev have now taken the initiative and, as their efforts become more visible, China, the United Kingdom and France must necessarily follow.

Has the Netherlands been too silent?

The Netherlands has a special reason to clearly and publicly declare itself in support of a world free of nuclear weapons in compliance with Article VI of the NPT. This particular reason is our position as the host of the International Court of Justice. We Dutch like to refer to The Hague as the 'World's Legal Capital'. The ICJ unanimously declared on 8 July 1996 that, "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control."

As a member of NATO, the Netherlands should also make itself clearly heard in the upcoming revision of NATO's Strategic Concept. We have gratefully benefitted from the nuclear protection of the United States. Now, we should once more play our part as allies in modernizing the Strategic Concept. By supporting President Obama in his goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons according to the faithful implementation of Article VI of the NPT, we can again show ourselves to be a strong ally.

Given the clear indications that the United States takes nuclear disarmament very seriously and that the original objective of deterrence has lost its validity, we need to ensure that neither the United States nor the other NATO allies wait for each other. The Netherlands should play an active role so that the revision of the Strategic Concept will lead to the withdrawal of American nuclear weapons from the territories of non-nuclear weapon states.

It is understandable and appropriate that after the events of September 11, 2001, much attention has been given to combating terrorism. This new security concern should be taken very seriously. However, it is precisely because of this threat that there is all the more reason to reduce and ban nuclear weapons. Such weapons are useless in the battle against terrorism. In fact, their existence presents an increased risk precisely *because* there are terrorists. This

alone calls for the urgent implementation of Article VI of the NPT, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Here too, the Netherlands has a special responsibility. We co-created Euratom and since then, with each new enlargement of the EU, each new Member State hands over its fissile material to the EU. The time has come for this system to enter into practice worldwide through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Finally, there is the role of Europe. The Lisbon Treaty strengthens the role of the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. This raises the question whether the High Representative could afford *not* to take a position on nuclear disarmament. This seems inconceivable, despite the reality of the United Kingdom and France as nuclear weapon states. There are also the facts of the British security policy veterans Douglas Hurd and George Robertson (former Secretary General of NATO), and of a French President, Gaullist as he may be, who has declared himself in favor of a new multi-polar world and who has asked the former president of 'Médecins sans Frontières' to be his Minister of Foreign Affairs. In other words, it should be possible for the strengthened High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy to express positions on this matter on behalf of Europe.

The significance of the action of the first 'Group of Four' (Kissinger, Nunn, Shultz and Perry) lies in the fact that during the time they held responsibilities in the government, they used the threat of nuclear weapons as a means to maintain peace. Though it is unusual, we as 'policy veterans' consider this to be the right moment to speak out and join our former colleagues in their call for a world without nuclear weapons.