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A New Bridging Role for Canada

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On October 25, 2002 in the United Nations First Committee, Canada pushed the green yes button on the New Agenda Coalition omnibus resolution, L.3, Revision 1. This was no ordinary vote. For Canada was the only NATO country to support the resolution.

What does this action say about the New Agenda, NATO, and Canada itself? What are the implications for the nuclear disarmament agenda? Where should Canada's NGO community now concentrate its attention?

First, the New Agenda Coalition (NAC). In 1998, Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and Sweden formed a coalition expressing their concern for the need for a new agenda leading towards a nuclear-weapons-free world. The resolutions NAC introduced in the UN in 1998 and 1999 were vigorously opposed by the US, the UK, and France, the three nuclear weapons states in NATO. But NAC showed it had political support around the world, and during the 2000 Review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty demonstrated its political muscle as it engaged the nuclear weapons states in negotiations. The result was a Final Document in which all the States Parties to the NPT made an "unequivocal undertaking" to negotiate the total elimination of

their nuclear arsenals. This commitment was embodied in a program of 13 Practical Steps. NAC hailed this as a "landmark" achievement. NAC then presented a resolution to the 2000 Meeting of the UN First Committee that virtually repeated the 13 Steps. It passed overwhelmingly: 146 in favour, 3 opposed, and 8 abstaining. The US voted yes; so did every other NATO country except France, which abstained. Russia and a few of its former republics also abstained. The No's were cast by India, Pakistan, and Israel, which did not like the resolution telling them to join the NPT. Actually, the vote was a triumph of masterly diplomacy and confirmed the New Agenda states as the most important political force working today for nuclear disarmament.

In 2001, with the world in turmoil following the September 11 terrorist attacks and the new Bush Administration pulling out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and opposing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (thereby renouncing two of the 13 Steps), NAC decided not to submit a resolution.

But by April 2002, at the opening of the First Meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 NPT Review, NAC had recovered its footing and submitted a detailed working paper:

“We remain determined to pursue, with continued vigour, the full and effective implementation of the substantial agreements reached at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.”

Even though the PrepComm was an exercise in frustration with extensive wrangling over a timetable for meetings, signaling the deep divisions in the international community on the future of nuclear weapons, NAC brought in two substantive resolutions to the 2002 Meeting of the First Committee. As Ambassador Mary Whelan of Ireland told a Strategy Consultation convened by the Middle Powers Initiative, “The New Agenda Coalition is very much in business.”

The first was an omnibus resolution containing 25 preambular and 25 operative paragraphs. Reflecting, for the most part, the 13 Steps, the resolution upheld:

- A call for the Conference on Disarmament to establish an *ad hoc* committee to deal with nuclear disarmament;
- Entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and maintenance of the moratorium on test explosions;
- Resumption of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials;
- Prevention of an arms race in outer space;
- Nuclear Weapons States to maintain security assurances not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.

The resolution went slightly beyond the language of the 13 Steps in a few places. For example, dealing with the principles of irreversibility, the resolution called for the destruction of nuclear warheads that were being reduced in order to prevent their possible redeployment. This could be seen as a criticism of the Moscow Treaty that calls for the reduction but not dismantling of numbers of strategic weapons.

But on the whole, it is impossible to point to any significant difference between the resolution of 2000 and the one in 2002. Yet the vote shifted significantly. It was 118 in favour, 7 opposed, and 38 abstaining. Of the NWS, only China voted yes; the NATO 3 – the US, the UK, and

France – voted no, and so did Monaco (which always votes with the US).

Non-nuclear NATO states, with the exception of Canada, fell back from 2000 to an abstention in 2002. It is interesting to note that the seven East European states (Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria) on the verge of being taken in by NATO, also abstained.

There is no doubt that the US pressed its NATO partners not to support the resolution. The action means that NATO as a whole is reverting to its well-known strategy to retain nuclear weapons “for the foreseeable future.” Forced to choose between giving their full support to the NPT, as advocated by the New Agenda Coalition, and maintaining their allegiance to NATO, the NATO countries are sticking with NATO. I will return to Canada’s delicate role in a moment, but first we must examine the incoherence between NATO and the NPT.

In 1999, the Canadian government, following a recommendation of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, pressed NATO to examine its nuclear weapons policies. Without actually reviewing its policies, NATO began a process of considering options and issued a 130-paragraph document on December 14, 2000. The document said that nuclear weapons are “essential” and must be kept up-to-date as “credible deterrence.” Referring to NATO’s deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in six non-nuclear NATO countries, the document said: “There is a clear rationale for a continued, though much reduced, presence of sub-strategic forces in Europe.” Thus NATO’s Strategic Concept is carried forward in which “the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces. ...”

The contradiction between what NATO countries say in the NPT context and do in the NATO context is astounding. The very same countries that pledge an “unequivocal undertaking” to the total elimination of nuclear weapons then, in the next breath, reaffirm that nuclear “weapons are essential.”

The 2000 vote for the New Agenda resolution allowed the international community to think that NATO might address this incoherence and, over time, devise a non-nuclear strategy. But any such hopes have been dashed by the emergence of the Nuclear Posture Review and the US President's National Security Strategy, which assert the possibility of unilateral pre-emptive military action with nuclear weapons.

Though claiming reduced reliance on nuclear weapons, the US Administration wants to maintain them for offensive purposes. The Nuclear Posture Review states US intentions clearly:

Nuclear weapons play a critical role in the defense capabilities of the United States, its allies and friends. They provide credible military options to deter a wide range of threats, including WMD and large-scale conventional military force. These nuclear capabilities possess unique properties that give the United States options to hold at risk classes of targets [that are] important to achieve strategic and political objectives.

The US is now developing a “bunker-buster” nuclear weapon to counter the increased use by potential adversaries of hardened and deeply buried facilities. Under the Nuclear Posture Review, new personnel are being trained and nuclear-testing capabilities upgraded. The US Nuclear Weapons Council is considering resumed nuclear weapons testing.

A breakout of the testing moratorium would blow apart the already weakened non-proliferation regime. This is a matter of concern within NATO, to be sure. But the NATO states have not yet found the strength – or courage – to challenge the US's undermining of the NPT 2000 Review. NATO cohesion is invoked – and constantly thrown in Canada's face – whenever the accountability of the nuclear weapons states of NATO is raised. It is a strange kind of “cohesion.” It appears to be all right for the US, backed strongly by the UK and France, to break out of the virtual consensus in 2000, but it is

definitely not all right for the non-nuclear members to challenge this breakout.

That the US drives NATO is beyond dispute. The US is driving its aggressive policies forward under the cover of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and, since states everywhere are fearful of more terrorism, the disagreements within NATO are muted. Meanwhile, the development of a missile defence system forges ahead with NATO states lured into support with the prospect of lucrative contracts. The new members of NATO and even Russia, as a quasi-member, will not challenge the US because they need US support for their own economic endeavours.

The New Agenda recognized the interplay of these forces and factors inimical to the well-being of the NPT. Though Cuba, a long-time holdout, has joined the NPT and the NPT is the largest multilateral treaty on nuclear disarmament, the treaty is in crisis. The “good faith” provisions of Article VI are being flouted by the US and NATO is mute.

Where does this leave Canada?

As Bill Robinson (2002) has recently pointed out, “Nearly sixty years after the advent of the nuclear age, Canada still maintains a fundamentally ambiguous policy toward nuclear weapons.” Though the Canadian government supports the elimination of nuclear weapons, it participates in a nuclear-armed alliance and endorses NATO's Strategic Concept. While Canada condemns reliance on nuclear weapons by non-allied countries, it continues to treat those same weapons as a useful – even necessary – element of Canada's defences.

Canada has done two things to break out of the Gordian knot:

- It has tried to get NATO to bring its policies into line with the NPT.
- It has voted for the New Agenda Coalition resolution upholding the 13 Practical Steps for the elimination of nuclear weapons despite a massive NATO abstention.

The government is struggling, but as was made clear to a Middle Powers Initiative delegation to Ottawa a few days after the UN vote, it does not like being “lonely.” In fact, on the second NAC resolution, dealing with reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons, Canada quickly scampered back into line with its NATO partners who, except for the Nuclear 3 voting no, all abstained (the vote was 115-3-38).

Canadian diplomacy has long operated on the principle that, if it is to challenge the US on anything deemed important, it needs “good company.” One would think that the NAC countries, being themselves reasonably friendly to the US, would constitute “good company.” But in the game of nuclear disarmament, NATO trumps the NAC. Since Canada’s defence is inextricably intertwined with NATO, not to mention the US, there is no question that Canada – at least at this time in history – will stick with NATO.

Lloyd Axworthy directly challenged NATO for its foot-dragging. Axworthy has departed the political scene (though his is still a powerful voice in the country). John Manley, the Deputy Prime Minister, seems unlikely to stand up for nuclear disarmament. Bill Graham, the current Foreign Minister and himself former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee that recommended Canada push NATO, is a staunch advocate of nuclear disarmament.

In a hard-hitting speech to the Conference on Disarmament, March 19, 2002, Graham pledged that Canada “will work to achieve the full implementation of the 13 Practical Steps.... We seek the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.” He specifically named negative security assurances as vital to the maintenance of the NPT, a none-too-subtle comment directed at the US. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that Graham has directed his thoughts towards NATO. And the questions surrounding war in Iraq and measures to counter terrorism dominated his recent meeting in Ottawa with US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Whatever the level of rhetoric and the continued ambiguities (read “incoherence”), Canada has a

clear obligation to live up to that which it has voted for in the New Agenda resolution. Canada has voted for negotiations, at some point, for a “legally binding instrument” to underpin a nuclear-weapons-free world. This means a Nuclear Weapons Convention, prohibiting the production and deployment of all nuclear weapons. This is the goal of the New Agenda Coalition.

It does not seem likely that Canada will press for such an achievement in the present environment. So difficult is this environment that even Canada’s efforts to establish nuclear accountability through modest reporting requirements have run into a brick wall.

I state all these difficulties not to add to the discouragement of those core NGO activists who continue to work on the nuclear disarmament agenda but to provide a reality check. The reality is that the Government of Canada, conflicted as it is on the issue, would likely not have voted yes for the NAC resolution had the NGO community not put pressure on it. There was certainly no public pressure, and the media once again demonstrated their lack of interest in the nuclear disarmament struggle. Parliament was virtually silent. There are some officers in the Department of Foreign Affairs who pressed for a yes vote, but they had a hard time being heard against the din from the Department of National Defence to stick with NATO.

There is, however, an interesting development that emerges from the yes vote. Canada is now instrumentally positioned to be a “bridge” between NATO and the NAC. It has good credentials with both organizations. It could, in a meaningful way, transmit NAC views to NATO and vice versa. Closing the gap between the two would be a high act of leadership in nuclear disarmament and go a long way to ensuring the survival of the NPT after the 2005 Review.

When the Middle Powers Initiative suggested that Canada play such a role, government officials said they needed help and that MPI could, in fact, provide a service by approaching the non-nuclear NATO states to support the New Agenda Coalition. MPI will do this. But MPI is

not a government. It is vital that a government take the lead in breaking the incoherence between NATO and the NPT. Only a government belonging to NATO can play this role effectively. Canada, with its principled vote on October 25, 2002, is so placed. It is up to the NGO community to press Canada now to play that role.

Reference

Robinson, Bill 2002, *Canada and nuclear weapons: Canadian policies related to, and connections to, nuclear weapons*, Project Ploughshares Working Paper 02-5.

Project Ploughshares is an ecumenical agency of the Canadian Council of Churches, formed to implement the churches' imperative to pursue peace and justice. The mandate given to Project Ploughshares is to work with churches and related organizations, as well as governments and non-governmental organizations, in Canada and abroad, to identify, develop, and advance approaches that build peace and prevent war, and promote the peaceful resolution of political conflict.

"and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4)