



Q & A - NATO and Nuclear Weapons

What is NATO ?

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is an alliance of 28 countries. It is dominated by the United States which spends far more on its military forces than any other country in the world.

What is NATO for ?

NATO was established to counter the perceived threat that the Soviet Union might try to invade Western Europe. The alliance is a creature of the Cold War. In recent years its role has been expanded. NATO has been used as a means of coordinating the US-led military operation in Afghanistan.

Which countries in NATO have nuclear weapons ?

Three members of NATO have their own nuclear weapons – the US, Britain and France.

In addition there are five NATO countries who store US nuclear weapons on their territory. These are Germany, Italy, Turkey, Belgium and the Netherlands. These B61 bombs are guarded by US soldiers, but most of them are allocated to the Air Forces of the host nations. There are a total of around 180 of these B61 nuclear bombs in Europe.

What is the future for these US nuclear weapons in Europe ?

In Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands public opposition to these weapons has resulted in calls from their parliaments for the bombs to be returned to the US. The governments of these countries have raised this issue within NATO, but no action has been taken.

The US has a \$11 billion programme to modernise the B61. They are transforming the old freefall bombs into precision-guided weapons, B61-12. This move has been endorsed by NATO, even though it runs counter to the public desire for these weapons to be removed.

What is NATO's nuclear policy ?

NATO's nuclear policy was written in the days of the Cold War. Between 2010 and 2012 the alliance conducted a Deterrence and Defence Review. The final wording of the review was heavily influenced by the nuclear weapon states (US, Britain and France) and avoided any radical change. The review reaffirms that so

long as there are any nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will be a nuclear alliance.

What role do British nuclear weapons play in NATO ?

In addition to the US nuclear bombs in Europe, the British Trident fleet is also assigned to the alliance. Britain is able to deploy a small number of lower-yield sub-strategic Trident nuclear warheads. These, as well as the strategic weapons, are assigned to the alliance. In addition Britain is able to launch the weapons, outwith NATO plans, when supreme national interests are at risk.

Should an independent Scotland be a member of NATO ?

Scottish CND is opposed to the UK being a member of NATO. Scottish CND felt that it would be more difficult for the government of an independent Scotland to get rid of Trident if the new nation was a member of NATO, than if it was not. NATO has discouraged Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands from taking action against the US nuclear bombs on their soil. The alliance would have delayed and blocked any Scottish plans to become free from nuclear weapons.