

De-Alerting at First Committee 2011

Written by John Hallam

Wednesday, 02 November 2011 17:32 -

In spite of the decision by the de-alerting group not to run a resolution in 2011 first committee, the de-alerting/operational readiness issue crops up in a number of resolutions, including the widely supported United Action resolution of Japan/Australia (both supported and sponsored by the United States and voted for by virtually all the nuclear weapons states), the Indian 'Reducing Nuclear Danger', a worthy resolution that ought to attract much more support than it does, in the New Agenda resolution, (where it is new and welcome language that helps to focus the resolution more on disarmament), and in the NAM resolution.

As one who has never met a nuclear disarmament resolution that I have not liked, and who welcomes the language on de-alerting particularly in all these resolutions, I think it is a pity that so many resolutions whose language is excellent, are not supported simply because of their provenance and for no other reason. (NAM and Reducing Nuclear Danger spring to mind) It would help the cause of nuclear disarmament greatly if some of the 'western' nations could deliberately and consciously 'break ranks' and vote with 3/4 of the rest of the world on resolutions such as the Reducing Nuclear Danger and the NAM resolution. Problems with the sponsors of these resolutions could be handled by an EoV. I note that there is one resolution at least where this crossover takes place to a limited extent, namely the resolution on followup to the ICJ decision.A/C.1/66/L.42, which attracts support from Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Ireland.

De-alerting is a vital issue: It has been pointed to as the single action that would do most to 'take the apocalypse off the Agenda', other than the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, to which it is a vital first step. Action in the First Committee, and at NPT conferences, needs to be translated into action in Moscow and Washington.

John Hallam

From Iranian resolution on

Follow-up to nuclear disarmament obligations agreed to at the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

A/C.1/66/L.3

(d) Concrete agreed measures to reduce further the operational status of nuclear weapons systems;

(e) A diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies so as to minimize the risk that these weapons will ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination;

From New Agenda Resolution:

A/C.1/66/L.31/Rev.1

(c) Further diminish the role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies;

(d) Discuss policies that could prevent the use of nuclear weapons and eventually lead to their elimination, lessen the danger of nuclear war and contribute to the non-proliferation and disarmament of nuclear weapons;

(e) Consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States in further reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems in ways that promote international stability and security;

(f) (g) 14.

Reduce the risk of accidental use of nuclear weapons; and

From united action towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons:

A/C.1/66/L.41*

10. Calls upon the nuclear-weapon States to take measures to further reduce the risk of an accidental or unauthorized launch of nuclear weapons in ways that promote international stability and security, while welcoming the measures already taken by several nuclear-weapon States in this regard;

11. Also calls upon the nuclear-weapon States to promptly engage with a view to further diminishing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies;

Resolution sponsored by India, Reducing Nuclear Danger:

A/C.1/66/L.45

Sixty-sixth session First Committee Agenda item 98 (r) General and complete disarmament: reducing nuclear danger

A/C.1/66/L.45

11-54954 (E)

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chile, Congo, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Viet Nam and Zambia: draft resolution

Reducing nuclear danger

The General Assembly, Bearing in mind that the use of nuclear weapons poses the most serious threat

to mankind and to the survival of civilization,

Reaffirming that any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons would constitute a violation of the Charter of the United Nations,

Convinced that the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects would seriously enhance the danger of nuclear war,

Convinced also that nuclear disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons are essential to remove the danger of nuclear war,

Considering that, until nuclear weapons cease to exist, it is imperative on the part of the nuclear-weapon States to adopt measures that assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons,

Considering also that the hair-trigger alert of nuclear weapons carries unacceptable risks of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons, which would have catastrophic consequences for all mankind,

Emphasizing the need to adopt measures to avoid accidental, unauthorized or unexplained incidents arising from computer anomaly or other technical malfunctions,

Conscious that limited steps relating to de-alerting and de-targeting have been taken by the nuclear-weapon States and that further practical, realistic and mutually reinforcing steps are necessary to contribute to the improvement in the international climate for negotiations leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons,

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Mindful that a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in the security policies of nuclear-weapon States would positively impact on international peace and security and improve the conditions for the further reduction and the elimination of nuclear weapons,
Reiterating the highest priority accorded to nuclear disarmament in the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly¹ and by the international community,
Recalling the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons² that there exists an obligation for all States 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,
Recalling also the call in the United Nations Millennium Declaration³ to seek to eliminate the dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction and the resolve to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers,

1. Calls for a review of nuclear doctrines and, in this context, immediate and urgent steps to reduce the risks of unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons, including through de-alerting and de-targeting nuclear weapons;
2. Requests the five nuclear-weapon States to take measures towards the implementation of paragraph 1 above;
3. Calls upon Member States to take the necessary measures to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects and to promote nuclear disarmament, with the objective of eliminating nuclear weapons;
4. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to paragraph 5 of its resolution 65/60 of 8 December 2010;⁴
5. Requests the Secretary-General to intensify efforts and support initiatives that would contribute towards the full implementation of the seven recommendations identified in the report of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war,⁵ and also to continue to encourage Member States to consider the convening of an international conference, as proposed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration,³ to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session;
6. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its sixty-seventh session the item entitled "Reducing nuclear danger".

From the NAM resolution on nuclear disarmament:

7. Also urges the nuclear-weapon States, as an interim measure, to de-alert and deactivate immediately their nuclear weapons and to take other concrete measures to reduce further the operational status of their nuclear-weapon systems, while stressing that reductions in deployments and in operational status cannot substitute for irreversible cuts in, and the total elimination of, nuclear weapons;

Statement from Ambassador Fasel of Switzerland on behalf of De-Alerting Group

66th Session of the General Assembly
First Committee

Cluster Nuclear Weapons:
De-alerting – Decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems

New York, 13 October 2011

H.E. Mr. Alexandre Fasel
Permanent Representative of Switzerland
to the Conference on Disarmament

Mr Chairman,

I take the floor on behalf of Chile, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland and Malaysia - our current co-ordinator who unfortunately cannot be here today due to their chairmanship of the Third Committee - on the issue of decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

Since 2007 our countries have called for action to address the significant numbers of nuclear weapons that remain today at high levels of readiness. Our countries believe there is an urgent need

for action to address this situation.

It remains of deep and abiding concern to us that twenty years after the end of the Cold War, doctrinal aspects from that era – such as high alert levels – are perpetuated today. While the tensions that marked the international security climate during the Cold War have lowered, corresponding decreases in the alert levels of the arsenals of the largest nuclear-weapon states have not been forthcoming.

We welcome the lower levels of alert adopted by some nuclear-weapon States. As with all other nuclear disarmament measures, it is the view of our Group that steps to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons should be irreversible, transparent and verifiable.

We welcome recent reductions in the numbers of nuclear weapons. What is also required is increased recognition that the high level of alert of those nuclear weapons that remain is disproportionate to the current strategic situation and that steps should be taken to address this inconsistency. We are disappointed that recent reviews of nuclear doctrine have not resulted in lowered levels of alert. We are encouraged, however, that the door has been left open for further work in this area and look forward to receiving an update on how this work is progressing.

We note the recognition of last year's NPT Review Conference of the issue of de-alerting and welcome the commitment by the nuclear-weapon States to "consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon States in further reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems" on which they are to report on in 2014. Reports in the interim on how this work is progressing would be most welcome and we will be pursuing updates at the preparatory committee meetings during the forthcoming NPT review cycle. We believe it is of utmost importance to achieve greater transparency levels than exist at the moment with regard to such military doctrines. We view progress in this regard as a major task for the years ahead which could facilitate further reductions of alert levels.

We have also taken heart from the recommitment contained in the Action Plan by the nuclear-weapon States to accelerate concrete progress on

the steps leading to nuclear disarmament contained in the 2000 NPT

outcome document given the strong reference in that document for action on operational readiness.

A lowered operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems would represent an important interim step towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. It would demonstrate a palpable commitment to a diminishing role for nuclear weapons. In addition, steps to lengthen the decision-making “fuse” for the launch of any nuclear attack would minimise the risk of unintentional or accidental use.

We are keen to capitalise on changes in the global security environment since the end of the Cold War. The adversarial relationships of those bleak times are clearly behind us and the threat of a conflict among major powers has become remote. Against this backdrop, the rationale for high-alert levels has lost its salience.

Mr Chairman

Our countries have presented a resolution on this issue to previous sessions of the General Assembly. While we remain committed to the operational readiness issue, we will not be tabling a resolution this year. Rather, we will be looking ahead to the forthcoming review cycle of the NPT, starting with next year’s preparatory committee meeting in Vienna, and measuring progress in that context. We will be putting forward a paper for discussion next year that canvasses the substantive arguments in favour of lowering the operational readiness of nuclear arsenals – as well as considering the full range of steps available in the multilateral political process to take the issue forward.

We will spare no efforts in advocating for progress towards lowering operational readiness in all relevant fora, including at the General Assembly, and will look to revisit our resolution next year.