

## Weasels Run Wild!

*In the second week of the NPT review conference, two weasel states completely lose the plot*

### 1. The Netherlands rides the woodpecker in Main Committee I

The Netherlands has always been one of the most weaselly weasels, and the least hesitant about loudly proclaiming hypocritical, self-contradictory nonsense in public. A lack of self-awareness is almost a requirement for being a nuclear weasel state, but the Dutch have taken it to new



extremes. We coined the term “riding the woodpecker” in response to a bizarre statement the foreign minister of the Netherlands made in the Conference on Disarmament back in March. But the Netherlands statement in Main Committee I on 6 May is the best yet.

It starts off innocently enough, with the usual weasel line advocating a step-by-step approach to a world without nuclear weapons, and recognizing the progress

achieved so far. But then it’s onto the woodpecker to fly far from reality and reason. “More needs to be done”, the next section begins boldly, before going on to describe how the Netherlands will not be doing any of it.

The humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is mentioned, along with the standard weasel qualification: “we cannot ignore security and stability considerations”. But wait, there’s more: “while geopolitical developments should be taken into account, they should not be a reason to slow down nuclear disarmament”. So what does that mean? We can ignore security and stability considerations after all? Or we somehow take them into account, but do not allow them to have any effect on our disarmament activities? What does that mean? What does it mean?

But there’s no time to ponder that, because in the very next paragraph we are told that “Article VI should be taken seriously”. Seriously, that’s what it says - in case you thought Article VI was a joke. And then: “We do not agree that there is a ‘legal gap’ with regard to this article”. No legal gap? What? Is the Netherlands saying that nuclear weapons are *already* comprehensively prohibited under international law, as the other weapons of mass destruction are? Well, that’s a relief. Or at least it would be, if any other country on earth shared this interpretation (even other weasels agree that a comprehensive legal prohibition will be needed at some stage in the disarmament process). Still, if there’s no legal gap, we won’t have to bother with an FMCT or any other irksome legal steps towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

No, wait, that can’t be right because the statement goes on to call for “work on further steps towards the negotiation of an FMCT” (i.e. work on further steps towards taking a step). Confused yet? There’s still more! The statement also calls for new transparency and reporting measures (but apparently not for the Netherlands, which has never provided any reporting or transparency whatsoever on the nuclear weapons based there), and for “steps to further [sic] reduce the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines” (the Netherlands has not taken any such steps itself, nor announced any intention to take any).

Perhaps best of all, there is an extended defence of “nuclear sharing”, involving some historical gobbledegook, and the bald assertion that NATO nuclear sharing is “fully compatible with the NPT obligations”. This is from someone who just told us that “Article VI should be taken seriously”. Not that seriously, evidently. And don’t bother asking how this continued nuclear sharing fits in with the call to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines.

When you’re riding the woodpecker, it all makes sense.

## 2. Norway’s foreign minister gets tangled, reveals awkward truth

He is not participating in the review conference (alas), but back in Oslo, Norwegian foreign minister Børge Brende has been answering questions from parliament on the NPT, nuclear disarmament and the humanitarian impact initiative (which Norway started, after all). In particular, Brende was asked to explain why Norway has not joined WP.30, the working paper submitted by 15 states that proposes how the findings of the humanitarian impact conferences should be incorporated into the outcome of the review conference. This is what he said:

“For Norway it is an important goal during NPT in New York to get a good final document which can act as an action plan for further nuclear disarmament. This is a particularly important aspect through all of the inputs which Norway has contributed to. It is crucial to adapt good formulations into the final document of the review conference which reflects the factual approach of the Oslo conference. ... The Austrian working document, promoted on behalf of 15

countries, also contributes to create attention concerning the humanitarian perspectives of a detonation of nuclear weapons, in accordance with the results from the Oslo-conference in 2013 and the following conferences in Mexico and Austria. Overall the document contains a set of arguments which leads to a ban as a natural conclusion. This is why Norway has not joined the document.”

(Unofficial translation - full text in Norwegian here: <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Sporsmal/Skriftlige-sporsmal-og-svar/Skriftlig-sporsmal/?qid=62562>)

Let’s take a closer look at that. Brende is saying that WP.30 accurately conveys the findings of the Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna conferences. In doing so, the paper leads to the “natural conclusion” that a ban on nuclear weapons is required. Brende accepts the premises and therefore the conclusion to which they naturally lead. But because Norway does not support a ban, it does not support the paper. Kafka himself could not do better than this. It is reminiscent of the Catholic Church’s disagreement with Galileo about whether the sun revolves about the earth or vice-versa: “Mr Galileo, the Pope accepts your observations and calculations, and the natural conclusion to which they lead, but NATO tells him that the sun revolves around the earth, so he will not be supporting your paper.”

