



## WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT NATO Civil Society Language for Statements About NATO

By: Group of 78 Thematic Working Group on Arms Control and Disarmament, Members of the group also represent several other NGO's, including Project Ploughshares, the Rideau Institute and World Federalist Movement - Canada

The purpose of this brief is to aid the writing of peace community **statements that refer to NATO or Canada's membership in NATO, so that they can be supported by a maximum number of civil society peace groups.** (Also assumed is agreement on the centrality and legitimacy of the United Nations.)

Virtually all peace groups see NATO as a problematic alliance because of its structure, its policies (including especially its nuclear deterrence policy), its history, or the nature of its expansion since the end of the Cold War. There are variations for all these aspects of "the problem", but the tone of criticism is similar.

Some believe that, following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the primary reason for NATO's existence expired, and from that point NATO also should have disbanded. Instead, NATO has doubled its size, absorbing countries that were within the orbit of the former Soviet Union.

There is also some disagreement about what kind of organization should have replaced NATO after 1989, if any. Should it be the OSCE, a merging of NATO and OSCE, European or other regional military alliances, a complete replacement with United Nations capacity,<sup>1</sup> an end to all military alliances, or something else? It is expected that there is no single position held by a diverse group of organizations, even if they are all devoted to a similar goal: a more peaceful world.

There are many positions that could be taken regarding NATO, including those that are pro, con and neutral towards the alliance. The ones most pertinent for the peace community, and anti-war, pacifist, and progressive global governance organizations, likely fall within these four categories:

- Those calling on Canada to exit NATO (and for the alliance to disband)
- Those that don't take a position because it is divisive for their organization's membership
- Those calling on Canada to stay within the alliance (to keep a seat at the table) while the alliance exists, or in the short term, but in order to influence/block bad NATO policy or behaviour.
- Those who don't advocate for an immediate withdrawal from NATO but believe different mutual security arrangements would be better.<sup>2</sup>

**Reasonable arguments can be made for all these positions**, and they will not be compared in any detail in this brief. The goal here is to find language that is compatible with as many groups and individuals as possible that hold one or more of the views listed above.

A broadly shared position need not acknowledge the existence of these four positions within civil society, but **it cannot overtly advocate in favour of the NATO alliance.**

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Charter, in Articles 45 and 47, does refer to a UN Military Staff Committee, although it has been dormant. 47(3): "The Military Staff Committee shall be responsible under the Security Council for the strategic direction of any armed forces placed at the disposal of the Security Council. Questions relating to the command of such forces shall be worked out subsequently."

<sup>2</sup> For example, some may wish to oppose NATO as an inappropriate mechanism for pursuing cooperative security while acknowledging that it is currently not politically propitious to call for Canadian withdrawal.

Could it state or imply that **whether Canada remains a member of the alliance or not**, it still must oppose bad NATO policy?

For some, there is only bad NATO policy, because the alliance's purposes were wrongheaded from the start (or at least since 1989).

For others, NATO is a forum that may be negatively distorted (or is inevitably distorted) by major powers, but "collective security" or "collective defence" itself is not inherently a bad idea. Indeed, the United Nations is based on a shared security framework, which is most clear in its Chapter 7 and 8 collective security Articles.

Quite explicitly Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, referring to Regional Arrangements,<sup>3</sup> makes provision for "the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security" (Art. 52 (1)) including the possibility of utilizing such regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority (Art. 53(1)). And Article 51 of the Charter's Chapter VII recognizes "the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations" (until the UN Security Council itself responds.)

As any position developed here is in search of shared language related to NATO only, and not towards the UN Charter as well, it will not delve into whether collective security, as agreed at the United Nations, is a good idea or wrong-headed to start with.

Broadly speaking a collection of states within a benign collective security context is not inherently threatening. What is problematic is bad, aggressive or manipulated policy that works against a more peaceful world. **There is agreement that civil society must oppose bad NATO policy.** That view exists even while polling regularly shows strong public support for NATO. There may not, however, be full agreement from civil society that states should try to change that policy from within NATO.

**There should be near consensus therefore for civil society (peace) groups criticizing NATO policy, without endorsing Canadian membership within NATO.**

**There could be near consensus for language that criticizes bad NATO policy and even alludes to the current status of Canada within NATO, but without endorsing that membership.**

There is less likely to be as strong a consensus where language criticizes bad NATO policy, and alludes to the current membership status of Canada, but **implies that membership is encouraged because it gives Canada positive influence** in determining or blocking policy. In other words, some see a seat at the table as a useful tool to block bad policy, but for others it is inherently a source of culpability (even if Canada is using its voice/veto to oppose bad policy.)

Until recently, civil society efforts at pressing Canada to challenge NATO member positions on nuclear weapons policy was seen as a "high water mark" for Canadian foreign policy. But concerns have become more vocal since the creation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (the ban treaty) and NATO's appeal to alliance members not to sign on. Some believe the best way to address bad policy is to distance (Canada) from it, and not to try and reform NATO to make it better, and thereby possibly prolong the life of the alliance. Some see efforts at reforming NATO to be an impossible task.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that, while NATO likes to call itself a regional *organization*, under Chapter VIII, in fact, in the view of the UN at least, it is a lesser structure – a regional arrangement. This is careful language to distinguish between "true" regional organizations such as the European Union or the African Union, and military alliances. Either way, however, the overriding point is that the UN Charter itself foresees this type of military organization. The UN Charter also allows for the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence through its Article 51.

Those who believe bad behaviour stems from membership in NATO, see culpability arising:

- If internal NATO mechanisms for opposing bad policy are insufficiently viable (ie footnoting, breaking silence)<sup>4</sup>;
- If Canada *could, but would not, oppose* bad policy, because of the nature of influence upon Canada as a NATO member;
- If membership is perceived inherently as an endorsement of NATO (ongoing doctrine, policy and history) even if bad policy could be blocked.

The purpose of majority or near-consensus positions for civil society would be to develop **co-signed statements or positions** that many credible groups (and individuals) -- not necessarily all -- could sign **without violating a range of peace group principles**. Those collective statements cannot compromise the separate statements released by each individual group, which might be more or less specific about NATO.

### What therefore is *likely* possible?

It is proposed here, that language along the lines of the following, might be supported by a large number of civil society groups that are critical of NATO policy, but wish to issue collective statements:

- **Statement language should be clearly critical of bad NATO policy including, where useful, the history of problematic NATO policy.**
- **It could indicate current Canadian membership within the alliance, but it should not comment on the rightness or wrongness of that status, or advocate for or against a change in membership status.**
- **The point of the language, therefore, is to criticize bad policy, not the institution itself.** That is left to the reader's imagination, and to the individual groups' own separate statements.
- **Collective statements should not adversely influence or violate individual group statements.**
- **The statement may or may not indicate that there exist a range of views about NATO among signatories.**

An example of a statement that is consistent with this framework is the language that was offered by Canadian Pugwash Group in 2017,<sup>5</sup> later adopted by the Group of 78/Rideau Institute's updated *Shift to Sustainable Peace and Common Security* (signed by ten organizations in 2018), and CNANW's Call to support the ban treaty (signed by about 80 organizations):

*"We call on the Government of Canada to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and to state that Canada will, through dialogue and changes to its own policies and practices, persist in its efforts to bring NATO into conformity with the Treaty, with a view to Canada ratifying the Treaty as soon as possible."*

That language was devised in the light of the differing views believed to be held within civil society on NATO, and it called for Canada to change its own policy, and to put pressure on NATO to change its policy, without arguing that Canada stay within, or leave NATO, nor that persistence in effort required Canadian membership in NATO, or that NATO would change for the better. It was not designed to please everyone, but it was hoped that many people would see value in this call.

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://pugwashgroup.ca/nato-canada-in-or-out/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnanw.ca/2017/08/15/canadas-contribution-to-global-security-canadian-pugwash-group-conference/>

## Appendix:

### NATO'S ARTICLE 1 reference to the UN Charter:

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

## CHAPTER VII: ACTION WITH RESPECT TO THREATS TO THE PEACE, BREACHES OF THE PEACE, AND ACTS OF AGGRESSION

### Article 43.

1. All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.

### Article 48

1. The action required to carry out the decisions of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security shall be taken by all the Members of the United Nations or by some of them, as the Security Council may determine.
2. Such decisions shall be carried out by the Members of the United Nations directly and through their action in the appropriate international agencies of which they are members.

### Article 49

The Members of the United Nations **shall join in affording mutual assistance** in carrying out the measures decided upon by the Security Council.

### Article 51

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair **the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence** if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

## CHAPTER VIII: REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

### Article 52

1. Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are

2. appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.
3. The Members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council.
4. The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council.
5. This Article in no way impairs the application of Articles 34 and 35.

#### Article 53

1. The Security Council shall, where appropriate, utilize such regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority. But no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council, with the exception of measures against any enemy state, as defined in paragraph 2 of this Article, provided for pursuant to Article 107 or in regional arrangements directed against renewal of aggressive policy on the part of any such state, until such time as the Organization may, on request of the Governments concerned, be charged with the responsibility for preventing further aggression by such a state.
2. The term enemy state as used in paragraph 1 of this Article applies to any state which during the Second World War has been an enemy of any signatory of the present Charter.

#### Article 54

1. The Security Council shall at all times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security.