

Norway parliament debate on March 12, 2015

Unofficial translations of quotes on nuclear weapons policy
and questions to the Foreign Minister

1. Parliamentary debate

Bård Vegar Solhjell (SV): On behalf of Liv Signe, Kjersti Toppe, Trine Skei Grande, Sveinung Rotevatn, Karin Andersen and myself, I submit the proposal that Norway should work for a global ban against nuclear weapons.

Anniken Huitfeldt (Labour Party) Chair of the Foreign and Defence Committee:

What makes the situation in the Middle East particularly dangerous, is nuclear weapons. It is not possible to consider these weapons as providing a value in any war. If they are used, there will cause a humanitarian catastrophe. We must therefore continue to work in nuclear negotiations with Iran and support the work for an international ban on nuclear weapons. Labor wants Norway to take a leading role in this work, and calls for a clearer line from the government when it comes to humanitarian disarmament. We were driving forces for the first Oslo conference for humanitarian disarmament, and we must take leadership in this work also.

Øyvind Halleraker (Conservative Party).

Obviously all sensible people are against the use of nuclear weapons and the cruel consequences of such use. However, we must be realistic and realize that nuclear weapons provide a deterrent and a balance of force which actually ensures that nuclear weapons are not used... We must note Putin's statement yesterday, where he asserted Russia's right to deploy nuclear weapons in the Crimea... We must adapt our position to this reality... It is deterrence, a demonstration of strength and a willingness to resist aggression which ensures our interests - not adopting populist proposals which would put all our security and territorial sovereignty in danger.

Kristian Norheim (FrP, Progress Party)

The cornerstone of NATO cooperation is the United States; Norway's most important friend and ally. NATO has not become less important over time, rather the contrary. Today's proposal for a ban on nuclear weapons indicates either a boundless naivety, or the fact that the former Prime Minister of the red-green government, Jens Stoltenberg, changed his perspective when he resigned and then became Secretary General of NATO, and that his former government 'lost his phone number.'

Kjell Ingolf Ropstad (KrF, Christian Democratic Party)

The humanitarian consequences and the risk that comes with the world's stockpiles of nuclear weapons, is well illustrated through the humanitarian initiative. Norway must be a driving force in long-term efforts for a ban on nuclear weapons - we must never give up!

Liv Signe (Sp, Center Party)

The arguments against a ban on nuclear weapons are similar to the arguments against Norway taking leadership to ban landmines and cluster munitions. The proposal for Norway to work for a ban on nuclear weapons is directed not against NATO in particular, it is supporting a cross-party understanding of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the imperative that these weapons are never used.

Trine Skei Grande (V, Leader of the Liberal Party)

I believe it is our job internationally to ensure that nuclear weapons should not be used in war because of their humanitarian consequences, and we must take action (fight) to ensure this.

Bård Vegar Solhjell (SV, Socialist Left Party)

Nuclear weapons do not make us secure - not in Norway, not in Europe, not in Russia. The risk of proliferation is larger than before, and the risk of nuclear weapons being used by accident is larger than

before. Therefore, there is broad support in the Norwegian parliament to seek a nuclear weapons ban. The government makes a big mistake, and I think Conservative Party and Progress Party here in this hall make a big mistake, when they express "horror" and go on a frontal attack against the desire for a nuclear weapons ban.

2. Parliamentary questions to the Foreign Minister on a nuclear weapons ban

Anniken Huitfeldt (A). Norway is a NATO country. It gives us a somewhat different role in foreign policy than, for example, Austria. Two other NATO countries have signaled an interest in this work, Iceland and Denmark. Will the Foreign Minister consider creating a political basis for an international ban on nuclear weapons, possibly in cooperation with Iceland and Denmark?

Reply from Foreign Minister Brende: We have at this time - before the NPT conference - held a dialogue with Denmark to find out their priorities. My understanding is that they emphasize disarmament, an area where we have not seen progress since 2010. Obama has offered a one-third reduction of the US nuclear arsenal. However, we have not seen progress on this offer. We should work on this. Also, as Labour's former chairman and current Secretary General of NATO has stated: Nuclear weapons remain a part of NATO's strategy so long as there are nuclear weapons. Today we see that there are grounds to continue working with the humanitarian initiative, and that goal and vision is no nuclear weapons. But the political basis for a ban does not exist today.

Liv Signe (Sp): Representative Halleraker in the current debate, and State Secretary of Foreign Affairs have stated that banning nuclear weapons would not be consistent with their view of NATO membership. Does the Foreign Minister agree with this perspective?

Reply from Foreign Minister Brende: Let me first make a brief reflection. We are in a situation where Russia yesterday warned that they will deploy, or at least have a right to deploy, nuclear weapons in the Crimea. We see that there is a risk that new states acquire nuclear weapons. Non-proliferation efforts are essential, and it is essential to get those who have nuclear weapons, to disarm. If one puts the question of ban on nuclear weapons at the tip, and nuclear weapons are part of NATO's strategy, adopted in 2012, as a binding political declaration - the declarations are binding - it is not in accordance with our NATO commitments. I do not think we get there, for we share the vision of a nuclear world. But we must be very cautious in the difficult security political landscape we have now, creating doubt about Norway's attitude when it comes to NATO strategy.

Bård Vegar Solhjell (SV): Norway took leadership in establishing Convention on Cluster Munitions. This leadership was very successful in moving other countries to join the treaty, and in moving those with the weapons to reduce the use of these weapons. The humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons, as the foreign minister has rightly said, is very important. It has given a new breath of life to nuclear disarmament after two decades of no progress. It will be important if one or more NATO countries go ahead by working for a nuclear weapons ban. One must have vision, but one must also do something about the vision, otherwise it remains only words. My question is: How will the Foreign Minister act in pursuit of that vision?

Reply from Foreign Minister Brende: First I must say that we have a situation where we feel that Syria is about to go off the handle, we have massive humanitarian crises, and Russia warns that they may be deploying nuclear weapons in the Crimea. We have held a distinctively Norwegian debate, and conclude that there is no political basis for either NATO or the NPT Review Conference to adopt a ban. I share the strong vision for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Representatives can trust that the government will take a stand on disarmament, and in particular call for those that have nuclear weapons to reduce the number of nuclear weapons. Representatives can trust that the government is uncompromising in its work to ensure that nuclear weapons will not be acquired by non-state actors. ISIL or other extremists must not obtain weapons of mass destruction and nor can other states acquire them. In addition, we will follow up the important humanitarian initiative on the vision for a nuclear world. But it is still a part of NATO strategy that NATO should have nuclear weapons as long as there are nuclear weapons. Therefore, adopting a ban on nuclear weapons is not currently in accordance with NATO policy.