



Select Committee on International Relations

Corrected oral evidence: Nuclear non-proliferation treaty and nuclear disarmament

Wednesday 19 December 2018

10.40 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (The Chairman); Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Jopling; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 13 - 26

Witness

I: Ms Sarah Price, Head of Counter Proliferation and Arms Control Centre, Acting Director for Defence and International Security, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Ms Sarah Price.

Q13 **The Chairman:** Good morning, Sarah Price. Thank you very much for being with us. You are Acting Director for Defence and International Security at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and we are extremely pleased to have you with us so that we can share your wisdom on these very complex and important affairs.

I remind you and the Committee that this is a public session and that what you say is all on the record. A transcript will be available for you afterwards to amend if you think it does not represent what you said. I also remind my colleagues on the Committee to declare any relevant interests when they ask questions.

We will start with a general assessment from you, because you are at the heart of these matters. How do you see the current state of global nuclear diplomacy? What are the challenges now that are leading many people, including this Committee, to be concerned that we need to look at matters more closely? In particular, what are the key drivers that you think are changing the situation and leading some people to the gloomy assessment that matters in this area are going backwards, not forwards? This is rather a general opening question, but of course we have other detailed questions to follow.

Ms Sarah Price: Thank you, Lord Chairman. The Government's assessment at the moment is that, overall, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is coming up to its 50th anniversary, is working. From the long-term perspective, it has prevented countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. Sixty years ago, it was predicted that there might be as many as 25 nuclear-weapons states. At the moment, we have the five recognised weapon states and roughly four others, so that is a success.

The NPT has been the basis that has allowed a large number of non-nuclear-weapons states to acquire full nuclear technology. We would not have been able to share that technology if we had not had the basis of confidence that the treaty gives us that it would not be proliferated for weapons purposes. It has also given us the confidence, as the nuclear-weapons states, to do the disarmament that we have done. Since the height of the Cold War in the 1980s, we have got rid of something like three-quarters of the nuclear warheads that existed then, so we have made progress over these 50 years.

The treaty has worked and continues to work. For example, the deal with Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons, the so-called JCPOA,¹ is based on the Non-Proliferation Treaty and draws on that work. The treaty also forms the basis for a lot of what the International Atomic Energy Agency can do through its safeguarding and inspections to give us all the assurance that countries are not misusing nuclear technology. The NPT is working. It responds. It forms a lot of the basis for the work that

¹ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

we as the international community are doing to stop the acquisition of nuclear weapons, including, for example, by North Korea.

You are absolutely right that there are challenges. The global security environment is not as good as it was 20 or even 10 years ago, and I think we all feel that more generally. We are all concerned about the challenges posed by some states to the rules-based international order, including the non-proliferation part of that—the treaties that are at a near-universal stage. We have seen that most clearly in the Chemical Weapons Convention. That convention does not deal with nuclear weapons, but once you start challenging one aspect of the non-proliferation framework, people's confidence in the overall framework to protect their security interests declines.

The international community is aware of those challenges, but I would also argue that we have responded to them. The international community has worked to address Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons, we have come together to address what the North Koreans are doing, and, particularly this year, we have worked very closely internationally to address the use of chemical weapons in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Q14 The Chairman: Thank you for that opening comment. I have one more general question before we come on to some more detailed and specific aspects. You talk about the challenges. What is your assessment of the roots of these challenges? Is it just the world as it is and events naturally unfolding, or do you see more specific roots? To respond effectively to challenges, one needs to understand what is guiding them. Why is this more disturbed world before us now, in your estimation? Why is it raising these difficulties and problems that you have rightly described?

Ms Sarah Price: The answer to that goes well beyond my areas of responsibility; it is a global question.

Specifically on the non-proliferation framework, over the past five years we have seen the use of a weapon of mass destruction—chemical weapons—in Syria, and the international community was not able to agree on how to respond to that. We have finally had some firmer response through the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague this year, but that has taken too long. Because of Russian vetoes, the UN Security Council was unable to respond to that Syrian use, or even to say that it was the Syrian Government, the Assad regime, using chemical weapons. That has undermined credibility; it has a corrosive aspect.

Individual countries having an interest in not calling out the use or even the possession of banned weapons has had an adverse effect. We have begun to respond to that, but we need to keep up the pressure.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: While I entirely share the Government's attitude and approve of their actions on chemical weapons, do you not think it is a bit unwise to make the analogy with the NPT? The Chemical

Weapons Convention is a ban convention, as is the Biological Weapons Convention. I understand you will say in answer to later questions that the Government do not much like the idea of ban treaties in the context of nuclear weapons.

The NPT systemises the possession of nuclear weapons for some countries and the non-possession of them for others, so making an analogy with chemical weapons seems a little odd.

Ms Sarah Price: I would not compare the nature of what the conventions are trying to do. I was talking about the extent to which they are respected and how we address non-compliance with them. The provisions are different, but if they are not respected and enforced you undermine the general respect for conventions like this.

The Chairman: In answer to my last question, you mentioned the chaos in the Middle East as being the sort of stirrer-up of concerns about weapons control and disarmament talks generally. I am a bit surprised that you do not point to what is happening in China and Russia. Surely they are the two big disturbers of the situation—or are they not? Maybe they are countries with which we need to seek new alliances.

Is this not where you should be looking and responding to the challenges, particularly from the new Russian hybrid warfare, its departure from the INF² and so on? You may say that this is above your pay grade, but you have to look at the roots of the challenges that you are meeting if you are going to meet them clearly.

Ms Sarah Price: Absolutely. I did not name Russia, but I think Russia is one of the main challengers to the rules-based international order in respect of the international arms control frameworks. You mentioned the INF, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. We agree with the United States that Russia is in material breach of the treaty, and we joined with our NATO allies to call that out at a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers earlier this month.

We absolutely agree with the US that that is not acceptable. It is a bilateral treaty. We are not parties to it, but it affects European security very much. So we absolutely stand by the United States, which is in compliance with the treaty. It is not acceptable for only one party to the treaty to be in compliance, so we have called that out.

Q15 Lord Reid of Cardowan: Good morning. You correctly pointed out that this country had shown good faith under the NPT and the attempts to reduce nuclear weaponry. I declare an interest: I was Defence Minister when we did so in getting rid of one of the systems, the air-launched nuclear-weapons, and reducing those in our submarines and so on and preparation times. However, even if other countries show good faith and have the motivation to comply and enhance security and stability, technology is running pretty fast ahead of our capacity to deal with it.

² The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

To what extent do you think that technology—I am thinking specifically about the role of software and cyber in all infrastructure, including nuclear-weapons—undermines the stability that we seek to get from the NPT and the general bilateral and multilateral negotiations connected with it?

Ms Sarah Price: Absolutely. We agree that we need to keep abreast or ahead of emerging technologies. Primarily we do that defensively so that we know what is coming at us, which is something that the Ministry of Defence in particular is following closely and investing in research to keep track of.

Then there is the question of how we develop new things. If there is the possibility, there should be a discussion at the Review Conference about looking at what threats to the regime are there, and if we can we should come together and agree on measures. We have no proposals ourselves, but the States Parties should be talking about this.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: May I push you a little further on this? Even if you have no proposals, is it your opinion that the idea that, say, nuclear submarines—the Vanguard class or whatever comes after that—are sufficiently safe and air-gapped in a way that would prevent others from intervening on them? Do you take a view on that?

Ms Sarah Price: It is something that the Government think about very carefully.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: Having thought carefully, do they have a view?

Ms Sarah Price: It is something that the Ministry of Defence and the Government generally look at very carefully. Forgive me if I do not go into detail, but they take every measure possible to ensure that our assets are protected.

Q16 **The Chairman:** On the JCPOA and what is going on in the Korean Peninsula, first, do you regard the American refutation of the Iran nuclear deal as one of the challenges taking us backwards or forwards in our overall picture?

Secondly, conversely, what is going on with Kim Jong-Un and the bilateral meetings with the Americans? Is that part of better news? Just explain how those fit into your overall picture.

Ms Sarah Price: As I said earlier, the JCPOA is a success; it is the way in which the international community has come together to respond to the Iranian programmes and to limit them, and it has succeeded. I cannot now remember how many assessments we have had from the IAEA that Iran does not have a nuclear-weapons programme, so we are getting really high levels of assurance that we would not otherwise have had we not agreed the JCPOA with Iran. We regret that the US withdrew from the agreement, but we remain fully committed to it and will continue to implement it. So far, Iran is still fully in compliance with it, and so long as Iran is fully in compliance we will continue to implement it.

The DPRK is an intractable problem on which for a long time the international community has struggled to get traction. There have been many attempts to understand the extent of the North Korean programme and then to end it, stop it or limit it. The move by President Trump was bold and quite unexpected for many of us, but there is an opening there.

We and the international community will support that, but we need to see some results. We will maintain the level of UN Security Council resolutions that have been implemented unanimously against North Korea and its programmes, which is quite unprecedented. That will remain in place unless and until we see some positive action from the North Koreans.

Lord Jopling: I think you will probably agree that since the American repudiation of the JCPOA, banks around the world are terrified of doing any business that could be connected with Iran for fear of blacklisting by the Americans, but would you not further agree that, even before the American repudiation, one could argue that the Iranians never got a fair crack of the whip over the agreement, because the previous American Administration—I am thinking particularly of Congress—maintained what I would describe as a hold on the banks, which meant that vast amounts of business that the Iranians might have liked to have conducted could not be because of the constraint on the banks even before the American repudiation?

Ms Sarah Price: I think you are right to the extent that being able to use the US and the international banking systems is constrained by US sanctions. That is one of the reasons why the EU is trying to put together a special purpose vehicle, which we hope will be agreed this year, to facilitate business in Iran.

As I am sure you will know better than I, yes, businesses take decisions based on sanctions, but they are also based on a whole range of other factors, including the business environment in a country such as Iran. Their ability to do business is also affected by the actions of the Iranian government. The Iranian government also have a responsibility to make businesses welcome, make it easy for them to do business and give them the confidence they need that their investments will be worthwhile and productive.

Q17 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I think this is axiomatic in what you have said, but perhaps you could confirm it: if Iran were to withdraw from the JCPOA following the American action, or if the JCPOA for some other reason were to cease to be effective, would you regard that as a major setback to the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime in general likely to lead to much weakening of that regime?

On North Korea, is it the Government's view that North Korea was in fact in breach of its NPT obligations during the period when it was within the treaty, and that therefore any suggestion that somehow or other it is special and separate and should be allowed to progress towards being treated as a nuclear-weapons state is not an acceptable approach?

Ms Sarah Price: If Iran is not in full compliance, that is damaging to both the JCPOA and our confidence that it is not developing nuclear weapons. We would have to look at using all our tools and instruments to enforce obligations; it is a signatory to the NPT, and we need to ensure that it meets its obligations. It is a blow to regional and global security. I would not say that it is necessarily a blow to the NPT, because we would still have that and use our powers under it to enforce obligations.

It is our view that although North Korea has expressed its intention to leave the NPT, we do not believe that it has done so fully. We can explain the legal niceties of that in more detail if you are interested. We would say that it still has responsibilities and commitments under the NPT that we think it needs to meet. It is not special.

The Chairman: The other day, we had before us Dr Christopher Ford, the Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation in Washington. He issued us a copy of a speech he made earlier in which he talked about 'new initiatives'. Would anybody like to pursue that? I am sure that we would like to know a little more about what he said.

Lord Wood of Anfield: I was going to ask a question about what Chris Ford said, which he also said at Wilton Park. He queried the 'co-equality', as he put it, of the three pillars of the non-proliferation regime and suggested that of the three pillars, one was more of a pillar than the other two in quite a fundamental way.

The Chairman: May I stop you? It is my fault, but we are trying to deal first with the new initiative, raised in particular by Baroness Anelay. We will then come on to your question.

Lord Wood of Anfield: Now you know what I am going to ask.

Q18 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** This is a very simple question. I am sure you are familiar with what Dr Ford said at Wilton Park, which he subsequently said to us. He also gave us a copy of his Wilton Park speech. He has put forward his ideas for what the US Administration calls a 'working group on creating the conditions'—for non-proliferation, I imagine, although the words 'for non-proliferation and disarmament' are not there.

It would be very helpful for us to know the Foreign Office's first reactions to this; presumably, you are aware of these conditions too. Is this initiative going anywhere? Is it likely to assist preparations for the Review Conference next year? Will we participate in it? What would we contribute to it? A little on that would be very helpful.

Ms Sarah Price: Certainly. I think he is veering away from the word 'conditions' because a lot of countries see them as pre-conditions. I do not think that was his intention, which was to create the environment in which nuclear disarmament can happen more quickly and easily. This looks at how nuclear-weapons states and other possessor states can feel more secure and better able to start the disarmament process.

It is a valid point that just wishing nuclear disarmament, which I think the nuclear Ban Treaty tries to do, will not make it happen. You need to look for a concrete, step-by-step process. I would see this as one part of the step-by-step process, in much the same way that we have worked on the verification of nuclear disarmament. This is another step, another element, another part of the picture to allow possessor states to go further down the path towards disarmament.

They just launched this idea. It was previewed at Wilton Park and sent to the Committee. The United States is just starting to talk about it to partners and allies; they will then talk about it more broadly. We are looking at how we can contribute. We are very interested in this. We all have to work on how we can make nuclear disarmament more likely. However, nuclear-weapons states have a particular responsibility, so we will look at how we can contribute to that.

The Chairman: I am sorry; I am going to have to take this more slowly for some of us, because it is a very complex area. Dr Ford said that agencies—that is, Americans—approved a new approach to disarmament policy based on dialogue aimed at identifying and addressing negative factors in the global security environment and regional contexts. Could you, for the sake of the Chairman, say again why that is a new initiative? Is that not what you do anyway?

Ms Sarah Price: Of course it is, but it is an element of how we can reduce regional or global tensions, for example in a region with countries that possess nuclear weapons and do not have confidence in each other, or do not have confidence-building initiatives to look at how to break down the barriers to them having greater regional confidence, being able to talk to each other more and having more understanding and transparency about their nuclear posture and their doctrine.

That might seem obvious to us in the United Kingdom, but it is not obvious in some parts of the world. The theory is that encouraging nuclear-weapons states and possessor states to do more of that and to talk about it more with non-nuclear-weapons states would, over time, help to give nuclear-weapons states greater confidence to go further down the track towards nuclear disarmament.

Q19 **Lord Grocott:** You talk about a region of the world where there are nuclear states and non-nuclear states that might not understand each other very well. One region that immediately springs to mind is the Middle East. We have talked about Iran. One characteristic of that area is that three of Iran's neighbours—Pakistan, India and Israel—are nuclear states but are not part of the NPT. They are in very different categories, of course.

I know that from the time to time, the NPT has looked at this region as a non-nuclear region, if that is the right phrase. That seems a classic area where there is mistrust, fear, threat and periodic sustained periods of extreme violence. How does any review, if at all, consider the problem of that area, which Egypt in particular has shown an interest in trying to

resolve in the past?

Ms Sarah Price: We have a commitment as part of the agreement to extend indefinitely the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and work to convene a conference on making the Middle East not a nuclear-free zone but a WMD-free³ one. That is a hot topic. It is very difficult to do. Along with Russia and the United States, the United Kingdom is one of the co-conveners on that, so we have a responsibility to bring together all countries of the Middle East to talk about this.

There have been many processes to try to do this over the past few years, but it is extremely difficult to find fully-inclusive ways to do it. It is important to emphasise that this is not only about nuclear but about all weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, so it would also need to consider missile programmes.

Lord Grocott: If I may make a very brief observation, I agree with all your opening statements about the achievements of the NPT. However, it is quite a hole in the system when 50% of the nuclear powers are not signatories to the NPT. Well, it is not quite 50%; it is four out of nine, if you like. That does not seem to get discussed much. It is presumably in the 'too difficult' box.

Ms Sarah Price: With non-proliferation, you always have to take a very long-term view. When the NPT was opened for signature, China and France were not among the original signatories, although they have since joined. Countries such as Brazil and Argentina joined quite a long time afterwards, but at least they are all now members. So we do not give up; we have to keep going, take a long-term perspective on this and maintain it as the cornerstone of what we are trying to achieve.

The Chairman: We will move on for a moment, but we may come back to this.

Q20 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** You have just mentioned that we have to have a long-term view, but in the short term we have the RevCon in 2020. I am sure Lord Wood will follow this up with more specific questions, including, I am sure, on the issue of pillars, which was raised last week.

However, I would like to think about the work between now and the RevCon, which I know is a hectic period. It has sometimes been characterised as work that is trying to achieve no change because that is the least worst option. Is that how you view it? Or is work under way on some of the possibilities of achieving agreement that can then be confirmed in 2020? The example that I want to ask about is this: do you see any future in the idea of an agreement on the fissile material cut-off treaty?

Ms Sarah Price: You are right. It is 18 months away, which is not very long. It is something that we are working on now. We will consult

³ Weapons of mass destruction.

Ministers on what our short-term objectives should be in the run-up to the review conference. Some of the areas that we will look at include the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. We would like to make progress in all the steps towards nuclear disarmament. An agreement to start negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty would be a really big prize, and we will be working towards that.

We have the chairmanship of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva for part of next year, and we will work to take that forward as far as we can. Realistically, it will be very difficult because there is one participant that has objected for many years and is likely to continue to do so, but we are getting work in subsidiary bodies to try to prepare that and keep up the momentum. It is slow momentum, but, as you say, not going backwards would be good.

We will continue to do work on disarmament verification, which the UK has been leading on, and we will do so particularly with our Quad partners, the US, Norway and Sweden—we have been doing very practical work to demonstrate what is possible and how difficult disarmament verification is—and with the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. We hosted the IPNDV's plenary session and we are very involved in many of the practical working groups. There is also a UN group of government experts on verification, so we will continue to be reactive in that area. There is various other work that we will look at.

Disarmament is one important pillar of the treaty. We can look at the other pillars as well. We are also very active on non-proliferation and will continue to take forward our work with partners there.

The pillar that perhaps receives less attention is the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. I know that the review conference Chairman-elect, Rafael Grossi of Argentina, is very interested in doing more work to emphasise the benefits of peaceful uses for the wider membership who are not nuclear-weapons states or possessors. The treaty gives confidence to allow the spread of nuclear technology for civil nuclear power but also for a huge number of other scientific uses such as medical isotopes and research. He is very interested in bringing together participants who are outside the non-proliferation architecture, as it were—people who deal with the medical uses, for example—to build that wider understanding of the benefits the treaty has brought beyond the security side.

Q21 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: On the FMCT, do you not think that relying totally on the Conference on Disarmament to unblock this, given that the conference takes its decisions by consensus, is a triumph of hope over experience? Would it not make the approach a little more likely to succeed if the Government were to say that in certain circumstances this matter might have to be transferred to the General Assembly? After all, that is how the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was unblocked.

On the weapons-free zone for the Middle East, the Under-Secretary-

General of the UN, who gave us evidence last week, told us that, given that the efforts before the last RevCon failed, she and the Secretary-General were beginning a consultative process now to see if there was a way ahead but that they would need plenty of help from the three depositories, the UK being one of those. What are we going to do to help the Secretary-General?

Ms Sarah Price: On the WMD-free-zone conference, it was a decision of the First Committee of the General Assembly to ask the Secretary-General to take this forward, so the Secretary-General will do that. It still has some difficulties in going through the Fifth Committee because of funding and the question of how they are going to pay for it.

The biggest challenge that this initiative faces is persuading all the participants in the region to attend. One of the roles of the co-convenors has been for a long time, and will continue to be, to ensure that the conditions under which a conference is held are fair, accepted and inclusive for all the participants in the region, which has been very tricky. We will continue to play our role as a co-convenor on that.

On the FMCT and the Conference on Disarmament, this is a really difficult challenge. The Government believe that we should keep it within the Conference on Disarmament, because that is the only venue where all the countries that we want the treaty to cover participate. Taking it to the UN General Assembly would risk negotiating a beautiful treaty but one that was not signed or agreed by—indeed, was negotiated without the participation of—the countries that we most need it to cover.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: But they are all represented there.

Ms Sarah Price: At the Conference on Disarmament, yes.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: No, I am sorry; they are all represented at the General Assembly.

Ms Sarah Price: Yes, but we could agree a treaty without consensus that they would then not sign up to. We think that if they are involved in agreeing a treaty, ultimately they will be more invested in it and more likely to implement it.

The Chairman: Lord Wood, I am sorry. I cut you off.

Q22 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** No problem. Sorry for jumping the gun.

Building on the question of process in the lead-up to the conference, I want to ask about consultation with other possessor states. First, is it just fanciful to think that we have a process of direct engagement with China and Russia in advance of this? If not, what is that process beyond what we have talked about before?

Secondly, on the United States, quite a concerning philosophical shift seems to be going on. From what we heard from Chris Ford, it seems that the US no longer sees the non-proliferation framework as consisting of three equal pillars. Rather, non-proliferation comes first. This is not

just a matter of emphasis: the incentive for possessor states to disarm is radically changed if there has to be proof of further non-proliferation before they take their disarmament responsibility seriously.

Is that shift of emphasis something to be worried about, and does it affect the way we prepare for the next conference, in particular in partnership with the United States?

Ms Sarah Price: On consultations with Russia and China, yes, that happens. There is a consultation process between the P5—the five recognised nuclear-weapons states. It was a UK initiative in 2009. We proposed it. It fell a little into abeyance, but China is the current co-ordinator and has been very active. We had meetings in the margins of both the Preparatory Committee last year and the First Committee this year. China is also hosting a big meeting of the P5 in Beijing in January, so it is quite active.

We agreed two P5 statements in the margins of the First Committee and they are proposing a glossary of nuclear terminology, which does not sound very exciting but would level the pitch when it comes to agreement on what we are talking about. That may sound obvious, but we are talking to each other.

We also have agreement on a common reporting format, which, again, is a UK initiative. Again, that does not sound very exciting, but it is a way of encouraging transparency on the part of other P5 members to show the rest of the NPT membership that we are engaged and we are talking to each other. It gives us some confidence that we do talk to each other.

On the equivalence between the pillars, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, by its title, was originally a non-proliferation treaty. The idea is that there are other pillars. They are part of the bargain, but the original concept of the treaty is one of non-proliferation.

Disarmament has had a lot of attention over the past few years; it tends to become a bit of a warhead-counting exercise, whereas our view is that you need to work on decreasing tensions overall and giving people confidence to put the mechanisms in place that would allow for disarmament, rather than simply wishing all nuclear weapon away.

The peaceful uses are the quid pro quo, or benefits, for the planet and humanity that come from having the first one, then the second. I do not think that it is a shift; it is just a different way of talking about it.

Q23 Baroness Coussins: I have a question about what is on the agenda in the planning process for the 2020 Review Conference and an issue that does not fit neatly under any of the three pillars that have been mentioned.

Given what you said earlier about cybersecurity and potential vulnerabilities in that area, to what extent is it under discussion or on the agenda that there is an issue of access by non-state actors to nuclear weapons and nuclear technology, which would, by definition, be misused?

Ms Sarah Price: It is discussed a lot. I would not say that it comes into the arena of the NPT Review Conference specifically. A lot of what the International Atomic Energy Agency spends a lot of time, money and attention on nuclear safety and security. The UK is a very big funder of its work, as are the United States and Canada, for example. A lot of time and attention is paid to that, precisely for the reason you identify: the non-state actor terrorist attacks. That is happening.

There are also voluntary initiatives, such as the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and the United States Proliferation Threat Initiative. There is lots and lots of activity. We do a lot of global threat-reduction work through the G7, for example. Lots of different areas of activity are going on, which are relevant to the NPT but support it and are not necessarily covered by its treaty provisions.

- Q24 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** You talked about co-operation with China in making progress, but you did not talk about co-operation with the United States. To what extent has your relationship with the State Department changed? How much do they appreciate that their actions in relation to Iran are counterproductive because they force them into a corner and perhaps make them less, rather than more, co-operative?

Ms Sarah Price: We have excellent relations with the State Department. I do not see any lessening at all in our exchanges. Just yesterday, and the day before, I spent a lot of time with Chris Ford. We interact with them closely on every aspect of what is happening.

On Iran, we have made it clear to them why we differ from their assessment. We believe that it is worth staying in that and keeping it. I think they recognise the value of having IAEA assurances that Iran is still in compliance with the JCPOA.

- Q25 **Lord Jopling:** We turn to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which for ease we might call the Ban Treaty.

Leading up to the agreement on that treaty, when the nuclear-weapons states did not take part in those negotiations, was it wise to opt out of the discussions when it could have been possible to veto it if necessary? Could you tell us a bit about that?

With regard to the treaty itself and the justification for the UK and others to opt out of it, the Committee has already been made aware of the joint statement by the US, the UK and France in July last year. We have also seen Christopher Ford's expanded justification to the Carnegie Endowment in August last year for keeping out of it. Could you tell us what has happened since then?

You might also like to put on record briefly the reasons why the UK is against the Ban Treaty, particularly how the thing has developed, if at all, since June last year when it was agreed.

Ms Sarah Price: We looked very closely at whether we should participate in the negotiations. Our conclusions were that the treaty would not achieve our objectives for nuclear disarmament and that it

risked undermining the non-proliferation treaty. Those are the two reasons why we did not participate. We would not have been able to veto it and we had no intention of signing it, so we did not participate.

We think the treaty fails to address some really important questions that would need to be covered if we are to achieve nuclear disarmament. For example, it has a very weak verification regime. It sets a safeguard standard under the IAEA that we believe is a lesser standard than what we believe should be the gold standard. It has a comprehensive safeguards agreement standard, which is the standard model; it does not have the additional protocol as standard, and we think that is dangerous because we want to push forward to higher standards.

It also sets up a rival to the NPT. We think we should be addressing concerns—countries have legitimate concerns that disarmament is not progressing fast enough—but within the existing treaty, not by setting up another parallel process to which none of the nuclear-weapons states or possessor states have signed up.

Lord Jopling: But would we not have been wiser to take part in the discussion so that those views could be put over? If we did not like it at the end of the day, we could have vetoed it.

Ms Sarah Price: We have strongly made clear to proponents of the treaty our concerns about its shortcomings. We have engaged with those proponents, and our assessment was that we would not make progress, so we did not participate.

Q26 **The Chairman:** We have kept to a long time. I just have two final questions that I am going to try on you. First, is it correct to assume that the UK will take the lead in the five existing nuclear powers' arrangements after China? Is that what we are going to do?

Ms Sarah Price: That is correct.

The Chairman: This provides a major opportunity for us, as well as some new initiatives that you are no doubt considering.

The second point sounds a little trivial, but in addition to worries about the great powers escalating their tensions into nuclear war, which would be disastrous for everyone, there is quite a common view that this technology falling into the hands of non-state actors is one of the new horror dangers, as technology and miniaturisation takeover. Perhaps the public are fed too much by Tom Cruise films, James Bond films and so on, although I believe you can assemble a nuclear weapon from a website if you can find it.

What part of the NPT preparations and the RevCon itself are going to be concerned with this issue? It may be an issue that is much exaggerated, but is there any examination of whether these possibilities, which would destroy us all, are increasing?

Ms Sarah Price: It is certainly something that we and the States Parties to the treaty take very seriously. The IAEA, as I mentioned, spends a lot of time and money trying to address this.

The other area where we try to address it is through export control regimes, to ensure that the technology and material that you might need to try to create a bomb do not fall into the wrong hands. We work through the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the other export control regimes and ensure that we have good processes in place to control access to that technology. This is something that we spend a lot of time and resources on.

The Chairman: We will leave it there. Thank you very much for sharing your wisdom and the challenges, prospects and opportunities. That will be very helpful to our work.