



Select Committee on International Relations

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

Wednesday 16 January 2019

12.10 pm

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 Purvis of Tweed; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 49 - 56

Witness

I: The Rt Hon Lord Browne of Ladyton, former Secretary of State for Defence and Vice-Chair, Nuclear Threat Initiative.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

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Examination of witness

Lord Browne of Ladyton.

Q49 The Chairman: Lord Browne, thank you very much for being with us this afternoon. Apologies for running a little late; it is very hard to contain these great issues with national affairs in a tight timeframe. I have to remind you that this is a recorded public session, with a transcript that will be accessible for you to change afterwards if it does not match your understanding of what you said. I remind colleagues that they must declare any interests when asking questions.

We begin with the central assessment, or concern, of the current level of risk of the use of nuclear weapons and the current level of arms control discussion. We emerge from decades and decades of feeling almost comfortable—perhaps comfortable is too strong a word; of feeling that there was some kind of balance, and that arms-control discussions and disarmament negotiations were moving forward. Now there is a sense that they are not moving forward. Now there is a sense that arms control is breaking down.

Just give us your overall assessment, because you are deeply involved in this area. Are we being gloomy, or is there real risk? Is there a real basis now for renewed concern about what is happening?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: Thank you very much. First, I do not intend to make an opening statement, but I just want to say a couple of things at the beginning. I am honoured to have been invited to give evidence. I have done this before, but this is the first time I have not had a bank of officials to support me, so I feel a bit lonely.

Secondly, you have a global view of this issue, and I have to say that I am delighted that you have taken on this inquiry. It is a very complex area, but it is work that needs to be done, in my view, so I am very pleased that you have done this. Some of the questions that I have been given notice of have a very global reach. I deliberately concentrate on Euro-Atlantic security issues. I have views. They are mostly third-hand views about other parts of the world from what I have read, but I do a lot of work in the Euro-Atlantic environment, so I will necessarily talk quite a lot about that.

Thirdly, the NTI,¹ of which I am the vice-chairman, will submit written evidence, and if we do not get to some of the questions or issues that I have been given notice of, we will deal with them. I have brought with me as examples some materials that we will share with your supporting staff. We will give everybody copies. The NTI publishes some very high-quality documents, if I may say so. It has a series on rising nuclear dangers, which covers some of the issues that you are interested in. I co-chaired with Sam Nunn and Ernest J Moniz a working group on nuclear weapons in the new cyber age. That work is ongoing, and I know you are

¹ The Nuclear Threat Initiative

interested in it. We will provide hard copies of a lot of this, which we will get from Washington DC for members of your Committee.

Finally, I have a cough, which is irritating me. I will try not to let it irritate you.

In answer to your question, my assessment of the current level of risk posed by nuclear weapons is that it is worse than it was. Dramatic language is used about this by various experts: it is worse than it has been since the end of the Cold War. Others try to put some other comparator on it. However, it is clearly worse, and it is worse through a combination of the dynamics of the factors that instructed the op-ed published in 2008 by the 'four horsemen', as they became known, and informed President Obama's Prague speech about the combination of factors that have generated a world in which nuclear dangers are part of the problem and not just part of the solution for our security.

If I may, I will remind you of some of the issues that combine to trouble me and our assessment of this as an organisation presently. Our view is that we are potentially at a very dangerous point in our history, but that we should be thankful as a world that nuclear weapons have not been used again since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, there are many people who hold the view that that is due to good luck rather than good planning. We have been very fortunate that there has been no catastrophic accident, given the number of these weapons.

This is not intended to be a priority or even an exhaustive list, but this is presently the world that we in this part of the world live in. We have Vladimir Putin promising a nuclear build-up. We have Donald Trump's reckless tweets about the wisdom of a new arms race. We have a nuclear North Korea, an unclear path to denuclearisation and the effect that that has on that part of the world, which we have significant interests in. We have a ramping up of costly nuclear modernisation programmes in all the nuclear-weapons states of the world, which means in effect that nuclear-armed states are committing the next half-century's strategic stability to the deterrence of nuclear weapons working, and we are making these decisions for future generations by the scale of the investment that we are making.

We have—not here in the United Kingdom, thankfully—sustained, dangerous high-alert postures and nuclear weapons that are minutes from use. We have first-use policies. We have—unfortunately, from my perspective—a British Prime Minister, for the first time in my life, who believes that it is the right thing to do to say that she would use nuclear weapons if she had to, actually use them, which we studiously never said. We have an ongoing collapse of the suite of arms-control treaties that for decades have provided stability.

We have continued stagnation on specific important steps in the disarmament agenda, some of which have been going on for decades, on entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty, on the

beginning of a negotiation on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, and no obvious resolution to that stagnation.

Against this backdrop, we live in a part of the world where 95% of the weapons in the world are present and a significant number of them deployed. We have deteriorating trust and confidence between the West and Russia. I spent much of the last decade devoting significant energy to maintaining dialogue between the West and Russia to keep the lines of communication open so far as possible. I have not found that easy to do, and sometimes—I am presently in this situation—it has been government policy not to have high-level communication with the Russians.

Those of us who work in this space are all very familiar with the competing narratives between the West and Russia, but who is to blame for this? It does not solve the problem that we keep repeating these things to each other on the few occasions when we meet. The security environment has changed markedly over the time I have been involved in this. There was a lot of confidence and optimism in it in 2008 and 2009. That has deteriorated. We are enhancing NATO's deterrence and its defence posture. We have now got to the stage where we have a forward presence in the eastern part of the alliance. We have suspended, to all intents and purposes, all practical civilian and military co-operation between NATO and Russia. We say that we are open to political dialogue, but some people have a self-denying ordinance in relation to political dialogue of any description.

As I have already said, at the forefront of my thinking on this is that we live in the part of the world where 95% of global nuclear inventories are. There are too many weapons minutes from use on ready alert, as they call it, so we have created an environment where miscalculation, an accident, a mistake, or catastrophic terrorism are most likely to be the catalysts for nuclear use. So even though deterrence is paramount, it is not enough in this situation. Adversarial geopolitics is one pathway to a nuclear mistake, in my view, and is magnifying this risk. We will talk about this more, I suspect.

In the rest of the world there is the emergence of cyber and other technology, which are generally a threat to strategic warning systems and to nuclear command and control. Issues relating to decisions and the command and control of nuclear forces are more acute, particularly with little communication and co-operation between NATO and military leaders.

Increasingly, experts are beginning to appreciate this threat, but the problem is that it is not a threat that any of them can resolve on their own. If you look into the detail of how it has emerged and how it is developing—I hope you will, because it is an obsession of mine—we do not have the levels of communication that can begin to deal with these issues. Many members of this Committee work in this space and understand it. We cannot resolve this alone, because it knows no national boundaries.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for those opening comments. Let us try to dig deeper into the security environment, its changing nature and the effects. I suggest that Baroness Smith asks a question, and then I will bring in Lord Reid on the cyber aspect in particular, which has a major impact on the security environment.

Q50 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** Many thanks for your opening remarks. My question is very straightforward in one sense. You said that you are concerned that the Prime Minister said that she would use nuclear weapons. Surely the whole idea of deterrence is that other nuclear powers believe that we would use nuclear weapons. Otherwise, how does the deterrent effect work?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: We managed to get through a substantial part of the Cold War in an environment where the Soviet Union and the United States of America, who had far the biggest inventories, had an agreement that they would say that a nuclear war should never be fought because it could never be won, and would go no further about actual use. In this country—I was schooled in this position when I became Secretary of State for Defence—we lived in a world of studied and strategic ambiguity. We would never say specifically when we would use them.

I suppose the psychology behind that is that, as deterrence involves to a significant degree my view of what you think I will do if you do something, and I am not going to give you the red lines on that because you will move to the red lines, keeping you or any nuclear-armed opponent guessing about when and how we will use them is all part of deterrence.

I understand why the Prime Minister in the circumstances said what she said, but—there is no partisanship in this—in my view it revealed a lack of understanding of the responsibilities of being the Prime Minister of a nuclear-armed state. The political circumstances may have compelled her to do that, but I would like to have thought that there would have been wise heads around her who would have said, 'Whatever you do in these circumstances, please maintain our strategic ambiguity'.

The Chairman: Is part of what you are saying that life in the Cold War, when there were two antagonists, had a certain simplicity—perhaps that is too strong a word—or straightforwardness whereas once you get more countries like China involved in the whole dialogue it becomes much more complicated? Aside from your criticism, is that what you are saying?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I think we should move off this issue, and perhaps I should not have listed. We live in a much more complicated world. Many of these problems are generated by the fact that we have a 20th-century weapons system in a much more complicated environment.

In particular, that is relevant to the discussion about cyber. Many experts and many people who lived through the Cold War with serious responsibilities for the strategic security of the West concluded in the early part of the 21st century that these complications were increasing

the likelihood of use. One of them is that this is a multilateralised environment, not a binary choice in circumstances where there was competition that was easily described and was about ideology. That has disappeared. People had a narrative that they could understand.

The world is a much more complicated place. We are much more likely to see conflict spark the use of weapons. My view from a distance is India and Pakistan. I understand the concerns that China's modernisation programme has generated, particularly in the context of the United States' recent Nuclear Posture Review. They are exaggerated. That narrative was generated because it was a Nuclear Posture Review that had a determined end and it needed an excuse, a reason.

China's relatively small and restricted nuclear weapons system is deliberately kept small because it has a specific calculation that it is the minimum sufficient to guarantee retaliation if it is attacked. There are 270 nuclear weapons in China's arsenal. Their modernisation and the development of other capabilities generated the focus of the current US Administration's Nuclear Posture Review with its 4,400 nuclear weapons—that and Russia. I am not convinced by it. I am not convinced that China is developing its nuclear arsenal for the purpose that was attributed to it. The review did not attribute a purpose to China. It said that there was a lack of transparency and that transparency necessitated it focusing on what China was doing. It is a much more complicated world.

As important as the nuclear-weapons states are, because of cyber and the ability to interfere with command and control you no longer need to be a state to be able to interfere with these weapons. Non-state actors are now a factor in our consideration. I have as much interest in North Korea keeping its nuclear weapons safe as in the United Kingdom keeping its nuclear weapons safe. If the nuclear-armed states do not get together to ensure that these weapons are safe, we are all threatened.

Q51 Lord Reid of Cardowan: That very precisely brings me to the questions I was going to ask about cyber. There are two elements. The first is the vulnerability of modernised nuclear systems to those who would use cyber or hacking to get in. Will you say something on that?

In that context—I know you have spoken and written on this, but it has not always been accepted by others—will you comment on the tendency towards denial of that vulnerability on the part of the military and politicians?

My final question is not so much about the malevolence of external actors accessing nuclear system but about the propensity for accident, especially with the development of what we may call autonomous weapons systems. Presumably that will increase with the deployment of artificial intelligence. Will you say something briefly on both those subjects?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I may not be brief. I have read the evidence that has been given to your Committee. You already have experience of the sort of answer that one gets when one raises this with officials or

government. People move behind necessary secrecy. What they said to me when I first raised this, despite the fact that I had been the Secretary of State, was essentially, as the Americans would say, 'Move on, there's nothing to see here', and—I know this issue has been raised in your evidence—'We're fine because our nuclear weapons are on submarines. They're underneath the sea, so they are'—this is a word that should never have been invented—'air gapped'. As you said yourself, Lord Reid, the Iranians discovered at Isfahan that the air gap meant nothing.

From the perspective of the United Kingdom, we have a problem. The first step towards solving any problem is admitting that there is one. I find it striking that when I worked in the United States for three years for the Nuclear Threat Initiative, there was an openness about this challenge and problem. I am about to draw to your attention to a resource, although I am sure, knowing who is supporting this Committee, that your attention has already been drawn to it. However, it is crucial that people should consider and look at it. America is a much more open society, and in a sense it is much more grown-up. The Executive has a different kind of accountability through Congress, so while there is quite a lot of disturbing information, there is also a willingness to try to address the problem.

In January 2013, around the time I went out to the United States of America, the Defense Science Board of the US Department of Defense published a report called *Resilient Military Systems and the Advanced Cyber Threat*. The report gets more complex as you read through it, but it has a very accessible summary. The first line of the report certainly woke me up: 'The United States cannot be confident that our critical Information Technology systems will work under attack from a ... full spectrum adversary'. That is code for how all its resilient military systems, including its nuclear weapons systems, are capable of being penetrated by a full spectrum adversary.

At this point in the 21st century, North Korea is a full spectrum adversary and Russia is certainly one. Some of you may know this report well and you may remember that one of its recommendations at the end is that the United States should use nuclear weapons to deter a cyberattack. My suspicion is that the authors put that phrase in so that people would pay attention to the report and actually read it; I do not think they seriously considered that they could deter.

They went on to say in a throwaway sentence that this lack of confidence applied also to the weapons systems of allies and rivals. At that stage I was working in Washington DC. In many of the great think tanks there were people who would address events to discuss cyber ballistic missile control. Most of these people had come from the Department of Defense, which suggested to me that perhaps they had been doing that when they were in it.

Subsequently in 2017, David Sanger, a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist who writes extensively on these issues, along with a man called William Broad, wrote two complementary articles in the *New York Times* which

said that they had uncovered a programme called 'left of launch'. The United States of America was developing the ability through cyber to interfere with adversaries. They believed that it had actually been deployed against North Korea because of the way it had been developing its ballistic missile programme.

Only today, I discovered before coming to this session a paper, which is not confidential but has been published on a confessional website to inform Congress of the way the Department of Defense applies that programme, which suggests what is obvious in this report: that there are people in the United States of America who are for example building the ability to deploy cyber and to interfere with other people's strategic weapons systems.

It seems pretty obvious that they are not the only people in the world who are doing this. In 2017 the Defense Science Board produced a follow-up report. It goes under the guise of deterrence, but it focuses on the same issues and it is a complementary report. It confirms that there is no guarantee in this environment that the United States would have a reliable deterrent, and essentially—I summarise this very crudely—it recommends that the United States should take a small part of its strategic weapons systems and basically put it away in an analogue environment so that it could be guaranteed to have a small section that could be used.

To put it quite simply, deterrence works on the basis that it is a live threat, so that when you reach for it you can use it, but if the opponent knows that you cannot, the deterrent will not work. Strategic stability is threatened by this, but it is happening.

Finally, I want to draw this to the attention of the Committee. Last year, the equivalent of the National Audit Office in the United States of America audited the Department of Defense's own assessment of the vulnerability of its weapons systems for cybersecurity and discovered that in every single case where the Department of Defense had tried, using a cyber red team, to penetrate its own systems, the team had succeeded. That happened in every single case, including nuclear weapons and weapons on submarines.

When the audit office said to the Department of Defense, 'What about this system and this system and this system?', it was given assurances that those systems were fine, but when it asked whether the department had ever tried to cyber red team them, it said no. The audit office was given assurances about weapons systems that had not been tested, although every weapons system that had been tested by a cyber red team could be penetrated.

I have no reason to believe that we are better than they are, but we are not discussing this. In my researches I can find no instance of a Cabinet-level Minister in this country ever mentioning cyber in the context of a report about our modernisation programme. I can see no debate about this issue. I cannot find a select committee that has looked at it.

However, we are committing the next 50 years of our strategic defence to a weapons system that will have to live in this environment. I am becoming a pain in the neck about it, but we need to engage with this.

We now have in this space a potentially even more threatening problem coming down the line, which is lethal autonomous weapons. At the beginning of the process, we in the United Kingdom are stymying the international discussion about these weapons systems because we have our own unique definition of what a lethal autonomous weapons system is.

For four years, a United Nations international committee has been trying to find some sort of regulation for this. It is being supported significantly by people who work in the artificial intelligence environment. They write very concerning letters to the committee saying, 'You need to regulate what we are doing'. But that international committee cannot make any progress, because a definition of lethal autonomous weapons cannot be agreed and we are the people who are causing the problem. Again, we have our own unique definition of them. At the end of every year a report goes back to the United Nations saying essentially that, 'The report of this committee is that we will meet again next year'.

The Chairman: Lord Browne, you have given us a lot of food for thought.

Q52 **Baroness Coussins:** Following on directly from that, you have written several articles saying that the accidental or rogue use of nuclear weapons is difficult to anticipate or deter. In fact, earlier today you went even further and said that you thought it 'most likely' that that would be the cause of any use of nuclear weapons. Does that not suggest that it is more important to focus on disarmament rather than deterrence?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: That is what I do focus on. I describe myself as a multilateral disarmer who actually does something about it. Since the 1980s, our debate about nuclear weapons has been, 'Are you a multilateral disarmer or a unilateral disarmer?' All the unilateral disarmers I know are frustrated multilateral disarmers, and all the multilateral disarmers I know say that they are multilateral disarmers and then do nothing about it.

I am involved with the Nuclear Threat Initiative and spend so much time on this, because I buy into the agenda that informed President Obama's Prague speech. The only way we can make this world safe with these weapons is to generate circumstances in which we do not need them. If you want me to go further than that, the only way we will do that is if those of us who are party to the group of nations that have the vast majority of these weapons find some way of living together with each other in some form of mutual security. I agree with you about that.

The Chairman: We have 20 minutes and three big issues. Lord Hannay will start on the NPT.

Q53 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Let us have a look at Iran and North Korea. I

should start by declaring an interest as a joint chair of the All-Party Group on Global Security and Non-Proliferation and as a member of the European Leadership Network's top-level group.

To what extent has the handling of Iran and North Korea in recent years, including right up to now, strengthened or weakened the non-proliferation regime? Do you think our Government are taking the right line in insisting, along with their European partners, that the JCPOA² with Iran should be sustained? Are they doing enough to help sustain that in the face of some pretty aggressive behaviour by the Trump Administration? Where do you situate the Singapore meeting and the supposedly imminent second meeting of the North Korean leader and the President of the United States?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: The NPT, in my view, is arguably the most successful international treaty the world has ever had. It has been a remarkable success. The undoubted heroes of the NPT are the non-nuclear-weapons states, because, despite the doom that was predicted about the number of nuclear-weapons states there would now be, we have not got anywhere near that, and the NPT and its three pillars have contributed significantly to that.

The behaviour of Iran and North Korea threatened that, but in retrospect it has not damaged the treaty. In many ways it has supported and increased the treaty and made it far less likely that others who were States Parties to the treaty would be likely to want to follow that road. Who is volunteering to be a pariah state? Interestingly, this is the only time in my lifetime when no country is manifestly seeking to develop a nuclear-weapons system. That is because Korea has one, I accept that, but that has never been the case at any time in my life before. It is an amazing achievement, and a significant part is down to this treaty. I value this treaty enormously.

The threat to the treaty, if it exists at all, is internal because of the disappointment and frustration of the non-nuclear-weapons states about the nuclear-weapons states' failure to live up to their disarmament obligation. That is undoubtedly the case, and it is what informed the Ban Treaty and all the other stuff. We need to be honest about that. I am not saying it is easy for nuclear-weapons states in this environment to make that progress, but they need to be shown to be doing it, and it is quite difficult to see that they are really seeking to advance that agenda.

I supported the Iran deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. I argued for it. It was difficult sometimes, because it happened while I was in the United States of America and I did not always have the best of audiences when I was trying to persuade people strategically. I think it is a deal that deserves support, and I am pleased about what our Government and Europe have done, but it is difficult for them to do it in an environment in which the dollar is so powerful and in which American secondary sanctions can significantly affect what business people who

² The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the Iran nuclear deal).

would be prepared to work in Iran would do, and those business decisions will be made. That is not to make light of the fact that it is difficult to do business in Iran, first of all because it is difficult to do due diligence on who you are working with, as they do not have a history and you are not dealing straightforwardly.

I do not know where this is all going to go, but I am pleased that Europe has taken its position and I am pleased that my country has adopted it, and it deserves a significant amount of credit for it. I am afraid that most of experts I know, and I do not hold myself out to be one, are pessimistic about where it will all end up, but time may change that.

I am becoming increasingly more interested in North Korea and the Korean peninsula, for one very obvious reason: just over a year ago we had Kim Jong-un standing on the coast of North Korea threatening the United States of America, and the response to that was fire and fury. Now we are in a very different situation. We do not pay enough attention to what the South Korean Government have done to achieve that. The current leadership has been amazing in its ability to engage the north and to generate and sustain the momentum in the most difficult circumstances.

North Korea has demonstrated that it has improved the sophistication of its nuclear programme and it now has a credible nuclear-weapons system. The question is whether that was its objective, because that was the negotiating chip. A lot of people believe that. I do not know the situation well enough to be able to help the Committee, but I am utterly impressed by the distance that has been travelled in a very short period against the threat that it would break out into war. Who should have credit for that? I am reluctant to give it to certain people, but we are in a better place than we were. By managing this, and I have faith in the South Korean government, I think this can be advanced slowly. It will take a long time.

We in Europe cannot stand back from this, because this will have to be multilateralised, in the area and in the world. There are lessons to be learned from the disaggregation of the Soviet Union and the way in which that threat that could have occurred but for the intervention of the United States of America with the weapons that were disaggregated and with the skill sets that were developed. There is a lot of learning there. We, the United Kingdom, made a big contribution to that. We should dust off some of that, look at some of the skill sets, see whether we are still there and make that contribution.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Okay, so you have given a slightly upbeat response about North Korea. Presumably you would agree that, if real progress is to be made—and so far it is more apparent than real—there will have to be a system of verification and inspection of any commitments. On that, it has to be said that there is not even the faintest glimmer of willingness by North Korea to accept that, let alone the degree of sophistication of inspection that exists under the JCPOA.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I agree. I am on record as having said early in this process that if a deal is to be made on North Korea it will look very much like the JCPOA. There have to be restrictions on what North Korea can do, and there has to be inspection and verification to make sure that it stays within those restrictions. That is the JCPOA.

It was not helpful that the United States of America derogated from the JCPOA just at the point at which it needed support. So I agree with you. I do not want to be Pollyanna-ish, as the Americans say, about this, but we are in a much better position now about North Korea than we were 18 months ago when we were on a path of almost certain conflict.

The Chairman: We are almost out of time. I know Baroness Smith wants to talk about that, but we must pursue the Russia point that Baroness Hilton wants to cover and which you mentioned.

Q54 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** You mentioned Russia initially. Do you think our Government have the right approach to its attempts to destabilise the world order? What would you suggest our Government should be doing to encourage Russia to behave in a more responsible fashion?

Baroness Smith of Newnham: My question would have been a mirror image of that but in respect of the United States.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: The problem is that none of us is going to be able to press any restart button in relation to Russia until the Mueller investigation reports and that process works through. Our relationship with the United States of America is going to put limits on what we can do with Russia, and NATO is also going to put limits on it. At some point, we are going to have to advance that.

I would much rather that my Government—but they know best—did not have a self-denying ordinance that they will not engage with Russians at senior level. My own view is that we need urgently to maintain some high-level communication with the Russians, particularly given how significant they are. We have seen what they can do and what they did in the deployment of weapons of mass destruction in our country.

I spend a lot of time in Euro-Atlantic security dialogue involving North Americans, Russians and the Europe of the OSCE.³ Russia is not Putin. It is a very different country than it was when it was part of the Soviet Union. These discussions need to take place. We need to know and understand the motivations for this, because the time will come when we want to move together with the Russians because we live in the same environment. I remind people in Europe that 700 million of us live between 130 million people on one side and 300-odd million on the other. If this all goes wrong, this will all play out on top of us. Europe has to take much more responsibility for its own security and we in the United

³ The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Kingdom have skill sets that could be used in that environment, but dialogue is crucial.

The Chairman: We are in the last few minutes. I will bring Baroness Smith in in a moment, but Baroness Anelay has a question on the UK's role in all this. Where do we make our contribution?

Q55 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** I will just pick up on your last words about dialogue. You started the session by helpfully stressing the importance and value of high-level dialogue. The most obvious public expression of that every five years is the RevCon. Looking at the preparations for that, how do you see the UK's leadership panning out? How do you see the UK preparing for it? What would your advice be about how we should measure our success and what role we should play?

I am very much aware that you were instrumental in establishing the P5 process to try to ensure that there was this high-level dialogue. What do you consider to be the status of that at the moment and the role that it can play in ensuring the RevCon is a success, however we define success?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I, for the Government, suggested the P5, so I take some credit for it, but to be fair I delivered a speech that somebody else had written for me. I supported the speech, and I revisit it occasionally and remind myself of its purpose, which was to bring the P5 together in a way that would generate a convincing dialogue that could convince non-nuclear-weapons states in the context of the NPT that the they were taking their obligations under the treaty seriously. I am very pleased to have done that, and I am pleased that a couple of years after I left the Ministry of Defence and government it met for the first time.

In a previous evidence session, Lord Hannay quoted shortly one or more of the final statements by the P5. As these started to get published when the P5 met, I became extremely disappointed, because I thought I was creating a dynamic for disarmament and peace, and what I created was a cartel—a group of nuclear-weapons states that in many other ways could not bear the sight of each other, but when it came to the common ownership of nuclear weapons were very good at articulating an argument as to why they needed nuclear weapons only because the rest of the world did not behave itself well enough.

Interestingly, under the Chinese chairmanship of the last six months, that appears to have changed. The Chinese deserve a significant amount of credit for what they have achieved. They are planning this month a meeting of the P5 that will be at the vice-ministerial level. It will be the first time for many years that the P5 has met at that level. Those of us who have been ministers will know and understand that that is the point at which things can get done, because we are not asking officials just to carry water for us; decisions can be made. We are about to inherit that chair. If we continue that chairmanship and the trajectory which the Chinese have generated, we will generate something that can be taken to the RevCon.

We will not have enough time to get to this, but I know that you are interested in arms control. We should encourage the resumption of the negotiations for follow-on reduction of strategic arms between the United States and Russia, because, again, we are in an environment where for the first time nothing of that nature is going on. The suite of arms control treaties and measures that we have is deteriorating. We should take the lead when working with other countries on WMD security, including nuclear material security to prevent the threat of catastrophic terrorism.

Particular emphasis should be put on improving the security of radiological materials to counter the growing danger of terrorist acts through the use of dirty bombs. Diplomatic efforts should be renewed on US-NATO ballistic missile defence and strategic precision-guided conventional weapons systems to resolve some of the existing controversies and to reach agreement. Also, if we can generate a meaningful dialogue of some description on cybersecurity, we could achieve quite a significant amount and maybe not wear out the UK-Norway initiative, which is about the only thing that we can ever take to an NPT review conference.

Q56 Baroness Smith of Newnham: In a sense, this is a very quick question, drawing on what you said earlier about how unfortunate it was that the United States had pulled out of the JCPOA, and the reason why I suggested it was a mirror image of the question about Russia. The default position has always been to work with the United States on nuclear issues. Is there a problem for non-proliferation and wider nuclear issues if the United States has got itself into a position where it cannot be trusted to deliver on a deal that has been negotiated?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: There is manifestly a problem if the most powerful nation in the world gets itself to the point where no one believes its word in the context of an international treaty. That is a problem for us. Understandably, we have a very strong relationship with the United States as its ally, but I do not think that we should underestimate the power of Europe. The constant message from the United States to Europe now is that it needs to take more responsibility for its own security, and I agree with that. But if Europe does take responsibility for its own security, because of our geopolitical position it will be a different type of security from the one where you are separated from the threat by an ocean. It will be complicated and difficult to do, and it will be a different type of security because we have to coexist.

I regret that we are in this situation in a number of areas that I have interests in: arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security. I started this in a situation where I was optimistic, because we had the United States Government putting them at the forefront of their foreign policy, which unfortunately they did not deliver. They disappointed significantly, and we are now in a dramatically different situation, so we cannot count on that. However, we will not always live in these times. Unlike other foreign policy decisions that countries make and that we are making, this particular Executive has a time limit on it, so we will see.

The Chairman: I think it was President Reagan who said that it is amazing what you can achieve if you are prepared to give other people the credit. Lord Browne, through your personal work you have achieved a great deal and you have raised some disturbing but very important issues that will give the Committee a lot of further thought. In the meantime, I thank you very much. I am sorry that the session was not as long as we would have liked, but it has been immensely helpful.