



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Uncorrected oral evidence: The 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

Wednesday 26 February 2020

10.40 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Fall; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Lord Mendelsohn; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 12 - 20

Witnesses

II: Dr Heather Williams, Lecturer in Defence Studies, King's College London; Marion Messmer, Co-Director, British American Security Information Council.

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Examination of witnesses

Dr Heather Williams and Marion Messmer.

Q12 The Chair: In the second session this morning of our inquiry into the processes for the Review Conference in New York in the spring, it is my pleasure to welcome Dr Heather Williams from King's College, where she is a Lecturer in Defence Studies. I should put on the record that Heather Williams was the Specialist Adviser to this Committee when we carried out our long inquiry on 'Rising nuclear risk, disarmament and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty'. We also welcome Marion Messmer, Co-Director of BASIC, the British American Security Information Council. As ever, I remind you that, in coming here to contribute your expertise to our inquiry, this session is televised, on the record and there will be a transcript.

Thank you for joining us. I appreciate that you have been listening to the previous evidence session. I will ask the opening question and then turn to my colleagues for more detailed questions to follow. Looking forward to the RevCon, the forthcoming NPT Review Conference, how would you assess the state of global nuclear politics?

Dr Heather Williams: I thank the Chair and all Committee members. It is a real pleasure to be back here, so thank you for the invitation. Serving as the Specialist Adviser to last year's inquiry was a great privilege, and I am grateful for the opportunity to come back and give you a bit of an update.

I assess the current state of global nuclear politics as anxious. There is a very clear sense of urgency about the need to address a wide array of challenges. I highlight three particular sources of anxiety and concern. The first picks up where the last discussion left off and was captured in last year's report: nuclear risks are increasingly complex. That was highlighted last year in the India-Pakistan crisis, and in the US-Iran crisis just last month. There is increasing concern about the risks of escalation and of misunderstandings among nuclear-armed states.

A second cause for concern is whether our nuclear institutions are fit for purpose. Can the NPT manage contemporary nuclear challenges such as incorporating states that are outside the treaty, and can it constrain a state such as Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons? Many Non-Nuclear Weapon States and NGOs have expressed concern about the NPT's ability to promote progress. I am also concerned about the impact of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on the NPT, and whether it strengthens the NPT, which is an important institution.

The third source of anxiety is the future of arms control. The current US Administration, as we know, have withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iran nuclear deal, and the INF treaty,¹ and the future of New START remains very unclear. Arms control provides

¹ The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty

crucial transparency and predictability in nuclear politics, and without it risks will rise.

I also highlight what I think is a very positive development. Since I was here a year ago, there have been increased efforts at bridge building. The past five years have been defined by polarisation between nuclear weapon states and their allies, on the one hand, and supporters of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and some advocacy organisations, on the other hand. The past year has seen some improvements in that polarisation and efforts by both sides to take a more constructive and bridge-building approach. This includes adopting a more respectful tone towards each other and identifying areas of shared concern and opportunities to collaborate and make progress. Let me be clear: there is still a lot of work to be done, but on that front the polarisation has been slightly reduced over the past year, which is a positive development going into the Review Conference.

Marion Messmer: I agree with everything that was just said, which was very comprehensive; thanks for that. I highlight an additional concern, which Heather mentioned briefly, which is the challenge of possessors outside the NPT. That will become increasingly important; it will be important at the upcoming Review Conference, but it will become even more important in the next review cycle. All states in the NPT need to think more about how possessors outside the NPT can be engaged and encouraged to participate in important conversations around risk reduction and arms control.

I want to add another hopeful point. I was glad that Heather mentioned some of the initiatives that have been going on, because I too found them really heartening. In particular, the fact that such a plethora of states is bringing different initiatives to the NPT Review Conference is a good thing, and shows that everyone is concerned about the treaty and wants the Review Conference to go well and the treaty regime to be stable. I am thus slightly more hopeful about the Review Conference and how it is going to go than I might have been a year ago, before the Preparatory Committee meeting.

Q13 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** I shall not repeat the question I asked in the last session, because I think you were present when I asked it. Do you have any information on the US position on the Open Skies Treaty?

Dr Heather Williams: My research and understanding on open skies supports what Samantha Job said, which is that a decision has not been made about open skies and it is still under discussion in the Administration.

Q14 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** You listened to the end of our exchange with our previous witnesses, and you probably sensed that your view of the increased risk is one that is widely shared around this table. Can you cast any light on why on earth any P5 government find it worth while to say that risk has not increased? Why do people appear to be dug in on a completely non-credible proposition?

After years of loss of arms control agreements, after at least two of the P5 leaders have talked about the use of nuclear weapons, and after North Korea has clearly increased, and is still increasing, its armoury, why is anybody trying to say the contrary, as I think Lord Reid said in the exchanges we had with the previous witnesses?

Dr Heather Williams: I could not possibly hypothesise about why officials take that position. I have no insights into why that is their stance. As I said in my remarks, nuclear risks are more complex. I prefer discussing the complexity of risks to focusing on whether or not they are going up and down. That opens up a more constructive dialogue. I share your concern and confusion, to be frank, about why not just the United Kingdom Government but other governments will not acknowledge those challenges.

Q15 **Baroness Rawlings:** What is your assessment of the P5 meetings in London? Having read through the details on transparency, how transparent would you say the Chinese and Russian delegations are in an area as vital as this, let alone anything else?

Dr Heather Williams: King's College London and the European Leadership Network ran a series of civil society events on the P5, so I shall start this conversation, but then I would like Marion to jump in. What was my assessment and how did it go? The P5 meetings went as well as could be expected. They could have gone a lot worse; they were very carefully choreographed to try to avoid any disasters.

I can quickly summarise the positives and negatives, but at the outset I commend the Foreign Office in particular for its efforts in transparency in engaging with civil society. From the King's College London perspective, as a member of civil society and as the lead organiser in civil society events, I was, frankly, very pleasantly surprised by how committed the FCO is to transparency. We brought it some really ambitious ideas about how to involve civil society, the types of events that we might do and how civil society might interact with governments. As you say, not all governments are comfortable with that, and the Foreign Office was wholly supportive of our approach. As regards transparency with civil society, I think it was a huge success.

On the positives and what worked well in the interaction between states, the format involving civil society groups was very helpful. Again, I am happy to go into details on that. Progress was made on the glossary, as Samantha Job highlighted. It is a positive development to see P5 consensus on the topic of strategic risk reduction. As an NGO observer, and a pretty close watcher of the P5, one thing I noticed was that the P5 seemed more willing to engage on questions around emerging technologies. That was also a topic that came up in the inquiry and the report last year. There seemed to be more willingness to talk about cyberspace and what it might mean for nuclear doctrines, and I see that as a positive development.

What were some of the negatives? The geopolitical disputes among the P5 were on full display, in very public settings, particularly disputes between the US and China. There were some very tense exchanges between the Chinese and American ambassadors. Additionally, I do not think it is positive or helpful that the P5 continue to take such a hostile line to the nuclear ban treaty, the TPNW. I fear that that will be counterproductive over the long term.

There are outstanding questions among the P5, particularly on the question of whether to reaffirm the Reagan-Gorbachev statement: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought". As I understand it, they are still talking among themselves about coming up with alternate language. My assessment is that they will not agree to the original language; that ship has sailed, and it is now about negotiating some different terminology.

On the specific question, I agree with your assessment that there is an asymmetry in transparency among the P5 members. The Russians and the Chinese seemed a bit uncomfortable with some of the civil society engagement. However, in the way we organised the events there were some fully off-record sessions, and from my engagement in those they were quite forthcoming. I cannot say definitively that the Russians and the Chinese are not open to that type of transparency and dialogue; the forum matters a lot. That gets to something that I think we will talk about later, which is the CEND—the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative—and why I think that is a valuable forum.

Overall, the Foreign Office and MoD should get full marks for their efforts on transparency. To use an American phrase, if you will forgive me: they really put their money where their mouth is.

Marion Messmer: In the working groups that I attended at the P5 civil society meeting, I too found the Russian and Chinese delegates to be very engaged and participating very actively, which was a surprise, but a pleasant one. It highlights one of the great advantages of having such extensive civil society engagement at P5 events; civil society representatives can sometimes ask questions and bring hypotheses that members of governments or officials cannot bring, and sometimes you get a surprising response. That is really positive. The Foreign Office, as well as King's College and the ELN, should be commended for putting on such a large and comprehensive event.

In my overall assessment of the event, it was very positive that the P5 continue to exchange views on doctrine, to take that into the Review Conference but also beyond. That is going to be a very important aspect of managing risk and understanding how all members of the P5 assess current risks and what can be done about them. Equally, the consensus to continue with work around risk reduction is going to be very important and will have a big impact on the next review cycle.

All that is a good basis for going into the Review Conference and is perhaps slightly more positive than I would have assessed before the P5

meeting. One concern was, of course, that some of the tensions between members of the P5 would be carried out at the P5 meeting and, while there may have been some of that, overall it was very civilised; there was a sort of coming together of representatives and an acknowledgement that the Review Conference would be very important and that that should be a focal point of the attention.

Q16 **Baroness Blackstone:** This is a very big question, so you might want to break it down in some way. What prospects do you see for progress in arms control in the relatively near future?

Marion Messmer: It is a very big question, and I would like to differentiate between, on the one hand, the current political situation and, on the other hand, a slightly different political situation that might arrive after the US presidential election. Given the current political situation, and how the current US Administration portray their requirements for the future of arms control, which is through trilateral engagement with Russia and China, it will be very difficult to come to concrete agreements.

At the moment, it seems that China does not want to be drawn into trilateral arms control with Russia and the United States; the reason given is the difference in arsenal numbers. At the moment, I see no avenues for immediate progress along those lines. However, it is possible that there will be a change in the political landscape after the November election, and at that point there may be more opportunities. It is difficult to assess that in general, but arms control as a tool remains important for risk reduction and stability.

There are a lot of new questions that arms control can help to address. Some of those questions include incorporating new threats that have come about through new technological developments, including hypersonic missiles as well as developments in the realms of risks posed through cybersecurity. I stress that this is a good time to think about some new suggestions and some ways in which arms control could be different in future, so that when there is the political opportunity to make progress we have a big host of ideas that we can propose and we are not scrambling to come up with solid proposals. Lots of NGO colleagues are already working on that, and I hope we will see some vibrant conversations on the future of arms control.

Dr Heather Williams: I agree with a lot of that. I would break down your question into the future of US-Russia arms control and the future of arms control more broadly. I agree with everything Marion said; it will depend on the political landscape. If President Trump is re-elected, we need to prepare for a world without arms control as we know it. We already see steps being taken to lay the groundwork for that world and what comes next, which is that arms control may not be treaty based and may not just be between the United States and Russia.

Some of the forums and initiatives that we see now could, I hope, lay the groundwork for progress when political opportunities present themselves.

Those include, within the P5 process itself, talking about doctrines and risk reduction, which could contribute to future arms control. The US and Russia are engaged in strategic security dialogues, which I have heard have mixed results; some meetings go better than others. The United States has made an offer to China to initiate a dialogue with that country as well; to my knowledge, China has not yet responded. Trying to promote those sorts of more informal settings and forms of engagement may be essential to get through the next five years, if Trump is re-elected.

Baroness Blackstone: I take it from what you both say that you see the outcome of the US presidential election as absolutely crucial. Presumably, if President Trump were not re-elected, the outcome would depend on the Democratic candidate who is elected. There are lots of uncertainties.

How likely is it that New START will be extended? If it were not to be extended, what would the outcome be?

Dr Heather Williams: To my understanding, the US Administration are genuinely undecided on this and are still considering it, similar to open skies. Anyone who tells you definitively one way or another what is happening with New START may be pulling your leg, to use another American expression—excuse me for that.

As I understand it, the debate within the Administration is that we still have a year before New START expires, and that is time that could be used to explore options for an agreement with China or an agreement that would bring in intermediate-range nuclear weapons. That explains why a decision has not been made.

The other side of the argument is that Russia has said that it will need advance notice of intent to extend, because it would have to bring it through the Duma process. Any agreement with China or to include intermediate-range nuclear weapons is highly unlikely. Quite frankly, I struggle to conceive both. There are no incentives for China to join such an agreement right now, and it has said as much. Extending New START before the Review Conference would be a significant contribution to the NPT and the RevCon.

I am firmly in favour of the US extending New START immediately. What are the consequences if the US does not do so? It would raise very big questions about the future of arms control. Further to my previous answer, I think we need to prepare for a world without arms control. It raises questions about America's and Russia's commitment to Article 6 of the NPT, on nuclear disarmament.

As I have this opportunity, I stress to all of you that the UK is in a position to play a unique role. I encourage anyone in the UK Government, or officials, to encourage the Trump Administration to extend New START. This Administration have demonstrated that they listen to the UK—not all the time, I recognise, but on occasion. If a message came from the highest levels of government in the United Kingdom to the highest level

of government in the United States to extend New START, it would be a very welcome contribution to the process of extending it.

- Q17 **Lord Mendelsohn:** After such a strong presentation of a rather big case, I am going to narrow it slightly and probe what Dr Williams calls complex risks, to look at the issue around Iran and its issued threat to consider withdrawal if steps are taken against it.

In many ways, the JCPOA was an example of the strength of the NPT in and of itself. We have arrived at a situation where we are coming towards the Review Conference, with all the other events and other things happening. Iran is looking at that frame to try to stop measures being taken—the rollout of UN sanctions. How is that impacting on the NPT discussions or the likely circumstances of the Review Conference? Can you give us some idea of your assessment of how seriously we should take this, or whether it is one of the calculated steps that Iran is taking in responding to the international community? Is there something more serious about it or not? Should we look at its impact on the Review Conference as a potential negative about people leaving it, or does it help for it to be raised, in and of itself, as something that could engender a more interesting and rounded discussion about how to keep people in the framework, or even to think how we might create arms control by sustaining something around the JCPOA?

Marion Messmer: To answer one of your later questions first, the UK should take this threat enormously seriously. At the moment, it is an attempt at a diplomatic play of hands. As far as I understand it, Iran feels very constrained in its choices, so it is an attempt to get a reaction from the international community.

One big concern would be if Iran were to find itself in a situation where it had to follow through on the threat. That would have very serious consequences for the NPT, which are best avoided. One consequence would be that it would show the extent to which single actors can exert their power in a context where that should not normally be the case. It would also weaken non-proliferation norms and add to a sense of the disfranchisement that some Non-Nuclear Weapon States feel from the NPT, which might trigger further withdrawal and proliferation of nuclear weapons. All of those are serious reasons to take Iran seriously on this and for the UK to consider what it might do to alleviate some of the pressures that Iran is feeling.

Dr Heather Williams: I have nothing to add.

The Chair: It was very clear. Thank you very much indeed.

- Q18 **Baroness Fall:** I come back to what I think is one of the most interesting things that we have discussed this morning, which is the American narrative and what you have just predicted if Trump gets in next time. There is a sense that the existing processes are exactly that: processes. There is a sense that they are not doing enough to create progress towards any aim whatsoever.

I was interested in your comments about some of the alternatives, such as the CEND and the Swedish initiative, Stepping Stones. Are they valuable in themselves, or are they just a bandage if we get a second term of Trump? Do you hope that the existing processes will remain in place and then, when Trump is over, we can revisit them, or are we actually seeing a whole new world?

Dr Heather Williams: I can speak to CEND, and then Marion might speak to Stepping Stones. I do not see either initiative as a bandage; they have a stand-alone value. What makes CEND so unique is the format and the membership. The format is extremely informal and most conversations are on a first name basis. It is all Chatham House rules, so some conversations are totally off the record, with the idea of having very frank discussions. That makes some of the participants uncomfortable, but as a representative of one of the NGOs at the first two meetings, I can really see the value in those conversations.

The second thing that makes CEND unique is the membership. In the previous discussion, Lord Grocott asked about the four nuclear armed states that are not in the NPT. Eight of the nine possessors participated in both the CEND meetings to date. There are three sub-groups in CEND, and one of the specific topics was risk reduction. That is a forum where eight of the nine possessors are talking about risk reduction, which is unique.

I thought Lord Purvis's question in the previous session was helpful in pointing out that, when you go to other countries and talk to them about their security environment, it does not necessarily inspire confidence or equal dialogue. In the CEND forum, all the countries are talking about their security environments themselves; it is not about being patronised or needing to have something explained. I see CEND as a very positive contribution in that sense.

The next meeting will be held in Washington DC on 8 and 9 April, and at that stage we will be focusing on developing programmes of work in each of the three sub-groups. The sub-groups focus on reducing reliance on nuclear weapons, strengthening institutions and risk reduction; within each of those groups are co-chairs who are developing the concept notes and a programme of work that will set an agenda for the way ahead in getting into some of the more challenging substantive issues.

Marion Messmer: I shall answer the part of the question on Stepping Stones. On the Stockholm initiative, I should say clearly at the beginning that the political process around the Stepping Stones approach to disarmament is that it is run independently from BASIC; it was developed between the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and BASIC, so we had an input.

The idea behind the initiative is to bring many ideas that could be implemented now, in the current security environment, to the Review Conference for discussion, and to create an impetus for action that will go beyond 2020. It is about creating momentum for action in which pillar 1

actions—disarmament actions—can be brought forward, bridging divides between states and creating room for collaboration. In some ways, Stepping Stones shows that it is already achieving that. The 16 states that have agreed to take these ideas forward to the Review Conference are working together closely and trying to reach out to partners to make sure that as many states as possible can agree to some of the ideas being brought forward and can collaborate.

Questions around risk reduction are one example of the ideas that are being brought forward. That seems to have a broad-based consensus. The theory behind the approach seems to make sense to a lot of states beyond the ones that are already there. Through the years, the NPT has set far-reaching goals around disarmament, but we may need to take smaller steps to implement them. A challenge will be to make sure that those steps are implemented beyond the Review Conference. That is one of the areas on which the Stepping Stones approach will focus next, looking at how some of the ideas that have been agreed and brought forward can be operationalised to make sure that we see tangible proofs that they work.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: You mentioned one specific, but could you tell us a little more about the Stepping Stones approach? Does it differ in any noticeable way from the 13 actions signed up to, I do not know how many years ago, in one of the Review Conferences, or is it just a reshaping of those 13 actions?

Marion Messmer: It is very much intended to be a reshaping of both the 13 actions and the 64-point action plan that was previously agreed. The idea behind it was that, so far, we have not seen much progress on a lot of the points that were agreed, but they remain goals that states committed to the NPT have to reach at some point. The Stepping Stones approach is intended to be an implementation approach, whereby we still work towards the same goals but we try to look at interim steps that can be taken along the way.

Yesterday was the ministerial meeting in Berlin of the 16 states, and in a statement they announced a full list of the steps that they assessed as possible in the current political environment and which they could consider taking forward. That is a big list of several of the steps that they could consider taking forward for the Review Conference and beyond.

Q19 **Lord Grocott:** My question is about what would constitute a successful RevCon. I think you were around when a similar question was asked of the previous witnesses. I noted down their answer. They began by listing the four priorities, and I think what they were saying was that a successful outcome would be one that had mechanisms for moving towards the four priorities. I will need to read the transcript, but that is pretty well what I understood them to be saying.

Let me ask you the same question. Do you agree with the analysis that a successful conference would be some move towards machinery to achieve the four priorities that have been identified? A final and not

entirely facetious question is around the fact that one priority is to celebrate 50 years of the NPT. Is it your assessment that people attending the conference will be in a celebratory mood?

Marion Messmer: I agree with the statements made by the previous witnesses that a successful Review Conference does not necessarily have to be tied to a consensus document. In many ways, having a very vague consensus document just for the purpose of arriving at a consensus is not necessarily the most useful outcome. Something like what was described—getting to a point where it feels that the priorities are being implemented—would be a much stronger outcome than a vague consensus document. A successful Review Conference would demonstrate that states on the whole remain committed to the NPT and are willing to take action along those lines.

For example, something that for me would mean that the Review Conference was successful would be working groups on risk reduction that take action forward, beyond 2020. That would be a concrete outcome that would demonstrate that states are working on achieving some of the NPT goals in the current security climate. It would be a challenge to present such an outcome as a success to the wider global community because, in a sense, we have become accustomed to expecting a consensus document, and that could be a difficulty.

On whether states will be in a celebratory mood, it is important to keep in mind that the NPT has been a very successful treaty in some regards. The non-proliferation norm has become a strong global norm, and it is something that the great majority of states adhere to. At many times throughout the history of the NPT, it has not looked as if in 2020 we would have only nine nuclear possessor states; the prognosis for the numbers looked much higher, at some points. The success of some of the other pillars are things that states truly can celebrate and that we can be very proud of. It is about making sure that pillar 1 gets to a similar point whereby, instead of increasing tensions between NPT signatories, it is something we feel we can be proud of and can celebrate.

Dr Heather Williams: I would set a lower bar for success at the Review Conference. I think it would be a success if all states-parties reaffirmed their commitment to the NPT. I am not anticipating a consensus final document; there are different versions of a consensus final document that are somewhat conceivable. You might have just a few paragraphs or one page in which all parties state, "Here are the things we agree to". It would probably be, "We all reaffirm our commitment to the NPT". Then you could have a chair's summary that teases out some areas of difference.

It might be helpful briefly to relay to you the attitude of people going into the Review Conference. Quite frankly, most of us are approaching it with dread. We do not anticipate its being particularly productive, and we do not anticipate an outcome document. I think that people from all states and on all sides anticipate some very difficult and uncomfortable conversations. They are all arguments that we have heard before for the

most part, but confronting them in the NPT context puts a lot of pressure on the situation. People might feel celebratory once the Review Conference is over and we all get through it, hopefully with a final document.

That is my assessment of where we are. I want to flag up what I see as an additional challenge for the RevCon that has not come up yet. It might seem very nitty-gritty in the weeds, but I think it is quite important. One of the most fundamental debates going into the Review Conference is going to be over past commitments. Non-nuclear weapon states in particular believe that previous final documents that included commitments are legally binding. There is some disagreement between non-nuclear weapon states and among nuclear weapon states over whether those past commitments are legally binding or political commitments. What is their status?

That might seem like a very in-the-weeds argument, but it is probably the most fundamental debate that will be had at the Review Conference. It includes things such as the 13 steps that were in the 2000 final document. Some of those made commitments or talked about treaties that no longer exist, so the 13 steps need updating, but it will be a fundamental issue for the Review Conference.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: This is a follow-up question to Lord Grocott's. I was struck by the lead official saying that the number one priority was the celebration that it still existed. Of the two components, you can certainly celebrate an element of non-proliferation, but, as you have just outlined, Dr Williams, there is international concern in all regions, especially from those who have never desired to have weapons, certainly within the blocs, whether in Asia or Africa. They see that the commitments on disarmament have been set aside. You can celebrate non-proliferation, but the two components have to come together.

In the light of the earlier questioning of the officials, and your perplexity over why government will not admit to the risk, when we try to get information about what the risks are, whether from cyberthreats, non-state actors, aspirant states using cyber in addition to technologies to gain nuclear weapons, or other states that potentially will use some of these new technologies, the traditional view of risk based on a deterrent, with states operating against other states, is now less relevant. Therefore, the whole premise of deterrence is weaker than it used to be.

If Governments accept that the new threat environment exists because of those threats, it undermines the whole premise of why these weapons exist, especially given what Governments are going to be spending. I read that the W93² would involve up to \$500 million just for the research and development phase of the new warhead, which we are going to be locked into. Is the reason they cannot accept that the risk environment is higher that it undermines the whole premise of the deterrent?

² A sea-launched warhead

Dr Heather Williams: I could not speak to why the Government do not want to address that risk, but I think you hit on the crux of the issue, which is the challenge of defining what risks we are talking about. What we have found in the research, and I am guessing that Marion has a similar experience, is that there is a spectrum of views on the nuclear risks we should be most concerned about. At one end of the spectrum are concerns about the very existence of nuclear weapons. If you want to eliminate all risks of nuclear use, we need complete elimination. I am not supporting either of these views, or even anything in between, but, to articulate it, the view at the other end of the spectrum is that deterrence relies on manipulation of risk and that, therefore, we should increase nuclear risks and find the optimal level of ambiguity in our nuclear doctrine in order to strengthen the deterrent.

I see the logic of the argument that you have articulated, but that is only part of the debate that I have been interacting with about the types of nuclear risk. As we go forward with the mandate to look more at what strategic risk reduction means, this is the first challenge: where on that spectrum of risk do we want to direct our attention? My suspicion is that it will be somewhere pretty close to the middle. But I wanted to clarify what the counterargument might be, although again I am not saying that I agree with it.

Marion Messmer: To add to those points, with which I agree, because new risks have been added to the equation, it does not mean that old risks have become less risky or have gone away. One big difficulty in the risk conversation is the time element. I understand why you might want to know whether, today, the risk is quantifiably greater than it was, for example, during the Cuban missile crisis. A difficulty in answering that question is that the world has changed fundamentally in lots of different ways. It is very difficult in risk assessment to distil risk to a single number. The risk assessments that I have seen in my research, and the ways in which I describe risk, are much more qualitative, taking into account many different components.

You are absolutely right that non-state actors have become a bigger concern than they were at other points in the past, and new technologies and interactions with cybersecurity have become much bigger concerns than in the past. But that does not necessarily mean that some of the old concerns and considerations have been resolved or have gone away. In some ways, how we address those risks—the tools that were used in the Cold War, for example—are no longer used. That is also a cause for concern; maybe we can learn how risk reduction was done during the Cold War.

As Heather said, there are a lot of interesting conversations to be had, and I hope that we can get to a more comprehensive understanding of what exactly the security situation is that we are dealing with at the moment. That is something that the defence review will pick up on and will give us a chance to talk more about some of those questions.

Q20 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** You did not give a very upbeat assessment

of what a successful RevCon would be, and I am sure that is realistic. But you did not actually take into account what strikes me as one possibility, which is that you have a much more upbeat document celebrating 50 years of the NPT that perhaps masks to some extent the difficulty of writing several pages of detailed prose about where everyone stands on the steps to implement the 13 agreed points. You might like to comment on that.

I was struck at the P5 meeting by the heroism that had allocated one of the five break-out groups and introductions to what a successful RevCon in 2025 might be. I was slightly less struck by the heroism when I heard what was actually said in the report on that, but that was perhaps because it was consigned to the US to introduce the subject. What do you think the British Government should be doing between 2020 and 2025, irrespective of the outcome of this RevCon, to ensure that we do not have a similarly reductive prospect when we get to 2025?

Marion Messmer: Some of what the UK has done already has been valuable, and it would be great to see that continue. That includes the transparency measures around early engagement on the reports and getting feedback on that, and having extensive civil society engagement, not only in preparation for the Review Conference but on all questions to do with security and defence. To answer one of the questions that came up earlier, in my experience of talking to NGO colleagues around the globe, we are in a slightly unique position, in that that is not something that other governments do quite as extensively, so it is very much appreciated.

The upcoming defence review gives us a chance for more public engagement and communication, especially around doctrines and posture. One of my concerns is that, although we in this room and other experts take the NPT and the global nuclear architecture in general very seriously, it is something that the public has less and less awareness of and knows less and less about. If we want to make sure that people can make informed decisions about those questions, it will be very important to make sure that they have the knowledge on which to base their decisions.

Two topics, one of which has come up and one which has not, will remain very important for the next review cycle, and the UK could take proactive steps on them. The one that has come up several times already is risk reduction. That will remain important, especially given some of the questions that Heather outlined earlier about the future of arms control and whether it will remain treaty-based or move in a different direction. It is about keeping up the engagement on that in the P5 and NATO, and with non-nuclear weapon states, and perhaps even with states that have either already signed the TPNW or are interested in going in that direction. The UK being proactive on that, and signalling that it cares about how other states feel that their security is impacted by UK actions, would be a big step.

Another topic that has not come up so far but that is important for the health and longevity of the NPT is the question of diversity at the treaty. It has been brought into this review cycle a little, but some concerns among attendees and civil society observers are that delegations are often not very diverse. That is a concern when we are thinking about creative solutions in an NPT context and addressing some of the future challenges.

It goes beyond some of the more traditional ways that we think about diversity, such as equal gender representation, to making sure that NGO experts from less wealthy countries can be in the room as well; or even that less wealthy countries can have full delegations, because that is a big concern. It is much easier for a state such as the UK to have a big delegation with lots of experts, whereas other states really struggle. Given that the UK takes diversity very seriously domestically, and has taken steps to use that in its foreign policy, it would be great to see a UK initiative on greater diversity at the NPT, whatever form that might take.

Dr Heather Williams: There are three things that I think the UK can do for a successful 2025. The first is to lock in successes. I do not think we should be taking any progress for granted. The main success that the UK should focus on is its leadership, in transparency in particular. To re-emphasise my point from earlier, the UK should reach out immediately to the US Government to extend New START. That would be very helpful for the next review cycle.

Secondly, the UK should take leadership in steering the discussion and dialogue about strategic risk reduction. That includes the P5 process and perhaps exploring other potential forums for dialogue. Can the UK lead on strategic risk reduction in the CEND? I particularly encourage the Government to take on board questions around emerging technology and what it will mean for risk reduction. I fear it is not getting the attention that it deserves, not just in the UK but across the board.

The final thing is probably the most challenging. I would expect the nuclear ban treaty, the TPNW, to enter into force by the end of this year. The next NPT review cycle will include a fully entered-into-force TPNW, and I hope that the UK can play a leadership role in understanding how we live with the TPNW. It is not going away, and ignoring it is not going to undo the treaty's existence. I understand that the P5 have different legal positions and interpretations of the treaty, but fully ostracising the treaty and to some extent vilifying its members may not be the most productive approach for the next review cycle.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Dr Williams and Marion Messmer, for your contributions today on this crucial subject.