



Select Committee on International Relations

Uncorrected oral evidence: Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and nuclear disarmament

Wednesday 6 March 2019

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 Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Smith of Newnham; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 17

Heard in Public

Questions 152 - 165

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Ms Sarah Price, Head of Counter Proliferation and Arms Control Centre, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Mr James Franklin, Deputy Director of Defence Nuclear Policy, Ministry of Defence.

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Examination of witnesses

Sir Alan Duncan MP, Ms Sarah Price and Mr James Franklin.

Q152 **The Chairman:** Minister, good morning and welcome. Thank you for being with us. Thank you also to Sarah Price from your department and Mr Franklin from the Ministry of Defence. Welcome to all three of you. We are greatly looking forward to you sharing your views on these complex and serious matters. I must say, informally, that this is a recorded interview. A transcript will be available afterwards for any adjustments you may wish to make. I remind my colleagues to declare any interests, should they arise, in questioning as we proceed.

I will begin at the rather general level. As you know, we are looking into the Non-Proliferation Treaty of the upcoming RevCon and the context of all that, which is, of course, concerns nuclear disarmament and arms control more generally, where things are looking a little shaky worldwide and causing a lot of concern. We have heard witnesses say that proliferation is not the main issue, but that the worry is that existing nuclear states are rearming. On the other hand, others are saying, 'Well, wait a minute, proliferation could be quite serious if Saudi Arabia's interests in Pakistan's technology increases', as may well be happening. The prospect of what is called the 'Arab bomb' would be proliferation with a vengeance and raise all sorts of new and horrific issues.

Let us begin with your assessment from your position—you follow these things closely—of the level of nuclear risk, before we come on to the precise role of what we do in the NPT. A general assessment, please.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Chairman, thank you. First, apologies for my slight croakiness. I have been laid low, but I will do my best.

The general answer to your question is that the regime of containing nuclear weapons through the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) should be looked upon broadly as a significant success. Perhaps more than that, it has been a huge success. Over the past 50 years, it has minimised the proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivered certain moments of nuclear disarmament; for instance, we have reduced our own warhead numbers by over a half since the peak of the Cold War. It has provided a framework for developing secure and safe, peaceful uses of nuclear energy globally.

Without the NPT, we could have seen significant proliferation, potentially with dozens of states possessing nuclear weapons. Only nine have them at the moment. By and large, it is good news. It has contained things very successfully, as we would have wished.

The Chairman: You say by and large, but meanwhile the main parties—to the INF Treaty,¹ for instance, which we will come on to in detail—are talking now about merging theatre and strategic nuclear weapons, which is very unnerving. There is the possibility of new nuclear warheads and

¹ The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

missiles being developed, and a general sense, which we saw again and again in both written and verbal evidence, that we are heading for a new arms race. This is possibly not something to be complacent about.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I think there are two layers to this. One is the sort of missiles and technology within the nuclear capability that you are describing. The other is the number of states with nuclear capability. You are absolutely right that today's security environment is increasingly uncertain. We could argue that the regime we have seen over the past 50 years has perhaps stopped people developing nuclear capability at the speed they might otherwise have done.

We are obviously looking at the resurgence of Russia, the rise of Chinese assertiveness in some very important areas and, of course, the critical issue of the DPRK, which is the subject of discussion between it and the United States at the moment. We have seen an increase in tension just in these past few weeks between India and Pakistan, over which there is a potential nuclear threat. There is ongoing certainty.

On the subject of missile technology, perhaps I can turn to Sarah or James, who are better versed in this than me.

Ms Sarah Price: Our position—the United States would also argue this—is that, as a responsible Nuclear-Weapons State, as long as we possess weapons we need to maintain them to make sure that they are in good condition and that we have the right arsenal for our legitimate deterrent and self-protection defence. We also need to ensure that anything obsolete is renewed. We would make a distinction between developing new kinds of weapons, which we would not do, and maintaining the minimum deterrent necessary for our defence.

The Chairman: Would you like to comment from an MoD point of view in the general context of new weaponry being developed?

Mr James Franklin: You are absolutely right. As has been set out, there has been an effort to restrict proliferation, but we should not ignore the threats that still exist, particular from new weaponry. Indeed, one area of concern that we looked at was President Putin's State of the Union address last March, where he announced a series of novel weapons systems, many of them in the nuclear sphere. It is important that as we look at the global architecture of arms control going forward we can respond to and deal with such threats. That is all part of our ongoing dialogue.

I feel that as the defence representative I should make one more comment, although it is a little off-piste. Part of the role of the UK nuclear deterrent is to defend ourselves against all those attacks and ensure that we can deter extreme attacks against the UK. That is why we have our own deterrent today.

The Chairman: In a nutshell, before we proceed, is it HMG's assessment that the nuclear risk has increased recently, or not?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I do not think it is as straightforward or simple as that, without wishing to describe your question in such terms.

The Chairman: Sorry.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: There are risks, but we can see what they are, particularly in the case of North Korea. There is always concern where there are heightened tensions between two nuclear powers, as we have seen recently over Kashmir. It is very difficult to say yes or no to that, because there are always risks, which must be managed on a daily basis and with a proper understanding of any potential geopolitical developments and undercurrents.

The Chairman: I understand, and I apologise.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: As politicians, we always try to avoid those questions.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I want to carry on a little on that. I am slightly surprised by your response, Minister, because I think you would agree, would you not, that between, say, 1989 and 2014 it was not believable that anyone on the face of the earth was going to use nuclear weapons in a dispute, with the possible exception of India and Pakistan.

Then, from 2014 onwards, we have had a Russian President who speaks quite frequently about using nuclear weapons, admittedly in rather vague terms, and who brandishes new nuclear missiles and technology. We have an American President who speaks in terms about North Korea as if he would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons on them if he felt like it. Surely the degree of political risk has gone up quite sharply since about 2014.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: We are dealing with a climate of very different political characters, that is undoubtedly true. Whether the theatrical side of political life actually increases the risk of use is a moot point. There is no doubt that the language has become looser when talking about this. Perhaps 20 years ago, politicians would tread very carefully and be very precise about the exact words they would ever use about the possession of nuclear weapons. That has perhaps become less disciplined and is true of many, many aspects of politics, not just this bit.

You could equate that with greater risk and danger, or you could just say that it is a change in the nature of political behaviour.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: That is probably what Sir Edward Grey said in 1914.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Well, the lights may be going out all over Europe for different reasons as we speak.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I meant before that.

Baroness Smith of Newnham: I would like to press Lord Hannay's

point a little further, Minister.

Surely there is a significant difference between the period post 2014 and the post-Cold War period, which appeared to be characterised by some sense of reconciliation, we did not even talk about some sort of mutually assured destruction between the US and Russia because the two states may still have had nuclear weapons, and the idea of hostilities between the US and Russia or bringing Europe in seemed very unclear.

Post 2014 we are in a very different world, and it is not just about theatrics. Think about the annexation of Crimea—we now see a Russian President who is willing to act in a way that threatens Russia's neighbours and so is using language that is not just about theatrics.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Yes, they are doing things, but those are not nuclear. Of course we deplore the annexation of Crimea and east Ukraine. Whether or not that increases the prospect of nuclear use is, again, utterly debatable. There are many, many more uncertainties in the world, there is no doubt about that. We have seen the Arab Spring and splits in the GCC. We have indeed seen nuclear tests by the DPRK, which you can point to specifically as a nuclear-related incident. But the other sorts of issues that you are describing—Crimea and Ukraine—are not specifically nuclear in the way you imply, I would suggest.

Ms Sarah Price: The problems that we have seen from nuclear threats definitely predate 2014. We started negotiating with Iran back in 2003. It took 10 years to get the JCPOA,² but we were already concerned, from 2000 onwards, and the DPRK's first nuclear test was in 2006, so this has not suddenly appeared with one or more politician.

The Chairman: These are all points that we want to come to, but first we go straight into the RevCon and our role there.

Q153 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Good morning, Minister. The last RevCon in 2015, at which I declare I represented the UK, unfortunately ended without an agreement. What are the UK's aims and vision for the next RevCon, next year? In particular, how will the UK seek to use its leadership of the P5 process? I appreciate that you must be well into preparations on this, because of course the PrepCom itself is just at the end of next month, so—to borrow a phrase that is being used on other matters at the moment—the clock is ticking down.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: There are lots of ticking clocks at the moment. At the 2020 Review Conference, the UK looks forward to engaging in constructive dialogue with all state parties on disarmament and non-proliferation as well as promoting peaceful uses. I think we have to admit that achieving consensus is likely to remain very challenging, but we are committed to the NPT process and we will continue to work with everyone for as positive an outcome as we can.

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

The UK has a very strong record on implementing its NPT obligations across all three pillars. We have a strong track record on nuclear disarmament and we are committed to going further once security conditions allow and technical issues have been resolved.

On non-proliferation, we played a leading role, notably on the Iran nuclear deal and in support of a peaceful solution to North Korea's basically illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, and we play a leading role in ensuring that the peaceful uses of nuclear energy are shared widely, both by supporting the work of the IAEA³ and through bilateral assistance.

So I suggest that our track record on all this is very solid.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Can you at the moment identify any ways in which there are more opportunities to resolve some of the problems that prevented an agreement in 2015, and are there any new areas of tension? In your opening answer you talked about the challenges of reaching any agreement this time around.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: You have given me the opportunity to point out that the UK is likely to be the only member of the P5 to submit a national implementation report at PrepCom this year. I think that demonstrates our commitment to the NPT and transparency more widely. That singles us out a bit, I would suggest.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: But do you feel that we are now in a better position to achieve agreement on particular issues on which there was no agreement last time around?

Ms Sarah Price: It is quite difficult. We have been talking very closely to the incoming chair of the Review Conference, and he is working very hard already to understand the scope of the challenges and to look at how together we can build better potential for consensus. It is not necessarily easy, given what is going on in the rest of the world. We will focus on encouraging other countries to look at some of the very basic building blocks that are needed, for example, to work towards disarmament. Our work on verification is essential if we are ever to get towards that position.

We will also work with the incoming chair—Ambassador Grossi, who spoke to you—in particular on emphasising the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. This is a relatively under-discussed aspect of the treaty, but without the treaty most countries that never want nuclear weapons would not be able to access civil nuclear fuel, for a start, and many other aspects of nuclear-based technology that are essential for their development.

By working in those areas we can help to build the wider understanding that this is not simply about missile counting, which can sometimes be

³ The International Atomic Energy Agency

the rather simplistic approach; it is about a broader compact that allows better security but also better economic development.

Q154 **Lord Grocott:** Minister, a recurrent issue at these various Review Conferences has been the Middle East and issues relating to its being a nuclear-free zone. We all, I think, acknowledge the huge difficulties of moving forward on that.

In January, you sent a letter to the Committee about the P5 conference. These are not your words but words from the Chairman's Report on the P5 meeting: 'The five nuclear-weapon states are willing to continue committing to promoting the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction'. That is a pretty clear statement of intent, but how likely is it to be implemented? The question really is whether we intend to move this issue forward, which has been on the table in one way or another for more than 20 years.

Ms Sarah Price: As you say, this is a long-standing and thorny problem. We are very committed to making this happen. We are one of three co-conveners, and as you say we have been trying for 20 years to get the necessary countries around the table. It has so far not proved possible.

The latest development is that the General Assembly last autumn mandated the Secretary-General to convene a conference to discuss this. That will happen. Unfortunately, at the moment, Israel has not agreed to attend. We see that as a fatal flaw in this initiative. As co-convenor, we will continue to work with all the parties to see whether we can ensure full participation. The conditions to allow all necessary parties from the Middle East to feel confident about attending have always been the stumbling block so far. This conference is going to happen and we need to see whether we can encourage it to take place in such a way that all countries can attend.

Lord Grocott: Is the view that if Israel does not commit to attend we will all give up on the whole thing?

Ms Sarah Price: We have never given up. That is why we are still working on it after so many years. But it is very difficult to see how there can be any meaningful outcome if one very important country from the region is not present.

The Chairman: We have had witnesses say, 'Look out, the non-nuclear states are getting a bit impatient about the other part of the non-proliferation story', which is of course that the nuclear states should be engaged in increased nuclear responsibility. I think we need to pursue that a bit.

Q155 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I will follow up this line on what the UK Government are considering doing, at this year's PrepCom and next year's RevCon and more generally, in pursuing what you now call our role as a 'responsible' nuclear-weapons state—one that is recognised by the Non-Proliferation Treaty—but that could also be called diminishing risk.

What can you say about various aspects of the UK's nuclear policy,

including Negative Security Assurances, which are a bit obscure now? At one time, it was thought that the UK considering a sole-purpose doctrine: that is, we would use nuclear weapons only against another nuclear-weapons state that threatened us. Are you thinking of clarifying that? There is the issue of first use; some countries, including China, have first-use doctrines. Then we have the whole issue of de-alerting. How close to using nuclear weapons are we habitually? Could we, in concert with others, reduce that?

Could you respond to the three areas I mentioned as ways in which we could make a positive contribution to the discussions this year and next year?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: There are lots of doctrinal and academic questions included in that. I wish to be careful not to rewrite our doctrine by accident in the answers I give you. Let me answer as best I can.

The first thing is that we the UK are a responsible nuclear-weapons state. We have taken a number of unilateral actions that both build confidence and reduce tensions. As an example of some of the things that we have done, UK missiles have not been targeted at any state since 1994, UK submarines are at several days' notice to fire, and only the Prime Minister has the authority to launch nuclear weapons so political control is maintained at all times. More generally, UK nuclear weapons are political not military weapons in that sense. Their primary purpose is to deter the most extreme forms of aggression.

I think we have shown transparency in relation to our nuclear capability, including missile and warhead numbers, as well as to our broader nuclear doctrine. We have never said that there will be no first use, and nor should we. The merit of having nuclear weapons is that the deterrent has worked.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: And on Negative Security Assurances?

Ms Sarah Price: Our policy on Negative Security Assurances is set out in the last Strategic Defence and Security Review, from 2015. Our policy has not changed since then. We keep it under review all the time, but that is where we are at the moment.

Lord Wood of Anfield: Thank you for that answer. Can I follow up on what you said about no first use? I did not quite understand the logic of your justification. How is maintaining the threat of first use an important part of deterrence?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: It is crucial.

Lord Wood of Anfield: How is the threat of first use a deterrent against someone else's attack? I do not understand. Is there such a thing as a pre-emptive nuclear strike to deter someone?

Mr James Franklin: It is simple. Our argument is that we are deliberately ambiguous about how and in what way we would use nuclear

weapons, because we cannot afford to be otherwise. We do not want to make the calculation a simple one for our adversaries. You could equally run the argument that it reinforces deterrence and reduces the risk of nuclear weapons being used.

As in all the examples that have been set out, a process is gone through. By being more ambiguous, others do not know, and cannot get to a point at which they can see, when nuclear weapons would be used, and that is then played off against their calculation. It comes into the issue of reinforcing the principle of hard deterrents to deter an attack. We believe that is the best way to do it.

You can run the same arguments against those who have a policy of no first use. That is open to different forms of challenge as to how rigid it is and in what circumstances it would hold. By being ambiguous, arguably countries are less likely to use weapons against us and therefore the use of weapons is less likely.

Lord Wood of Anfield: So we reserve the right to strike a country with nuclear weapons.

Mr James Franklin: Absolutely.

Lord Wood of Anfield: Before they have attacked us.

Mr James Franklin: We are deliberately ambiguous about precisely...

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Yes.

Mr James Franklin: ...on what scale, when and how we would use nuclear weapons.

The Chairman: And on Lord Hannay's other question about using them only against other nuclear powers, do we not go for that either?

Mr James Franklin: As a nuclear-weapons state, we will not—off the top of my head—use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear-weapons states, in compliance with the conditions of the NPT. If you are a non-nuclear-weapons state, at the moment the NPT says that, provided you are compliant, we will not use our nuclear weapons against you.

The Chairman: Right. Let us look at other nuclear-related treaties.

Q156 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** Minister, you suggested that the NPT has been successful; I assume we would agree that the INF Treaty has been too. I think it was two days ago that Vladimir Putin signed a declaration to say that he is suspending the INF Treaty. The Americans are in a similar position. How vulnerable does that leave Europe? In what ways do you envisage the United Kingdom's security being threatened? To what extent do you envisage the Government perhaps supporting US missiles being based here or elsewhere in European NATO states?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I do not think it is for me to comment on that last point today. The INF Treaty has played an important role in guaranteeing

Euro-Atlantic security, but for the treaty to continue there must be full and verified compliance by all parties. A situation where Russia is illegally developing new missiles that could target Europe is unacceptable. That is our position.

We have been saying for some time that Russia is not complying with the treaty. I think that what we have seen is the unfolding of an inevitable course of events where it has been called to account for this. That is a great pity, because when the treaty started it was a great breakthrough and could have persisted. Sadly, it has not. It is a problem. Anything that causes the reduction of treaty certainty will of course increase danger to Europe and possibly beyond. That is regrettable. We would still urge the Russians to comply with the treaty and restore its credibility and implementation.

The Chairman: This is getting pretty serious, is it not? The Russians are now developing new intermediate-range missiles. President Trump says that America will do the same. We in Europe are in the firing line. Would we be prepared to accept new US intermediate-range missiles based on UK soil?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Inevitably, Allies will continue to keep NATO's posture under very close review, but there are no current plans to deploy new missiles either in the UK or in other European NATO countries.

Mr James Franklin: On that point, Russia has been in breach of the INF Treaty for five years or thereabouts. It is important to recognise that Russia has produced and deployed INF missiles in Europe, so that threat exists. NATO is going through an extensive process as an alliance of 29 to look at all the options; it needs to do that to respond to the capability that now exists. That work will include a range of responses, both offensive and defensive, and will run over the next four to nine months to try to work out the best possible response. Until then, we need to look at all the options. That may or may not include ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe. I am not saying for one second that it does or does not, but we need to consider exactly the best way to respond to this new threat from Russia. As I say, in six to nine months we will have a clearer sense of NATO's military assessment of that position.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Following up a little on that—and accepting your judgment, Minister, that Russia's breach of the INF treaty is not tolerable—one comes to the conclusion, presumably, that the chances of bringing Russia back into conformity with the treaty by the time the notice period given by the United States expires are pretty slight.

Can you tell us a bit about the alternative options apparently being considered in NATO and what input the Government have on the choice from those options? Are you considering extending the INF treaty globally to include countries such as China? That is perhaps a good long-term policy, but it is not likely to produce results in the short term. Are you considering what you might call regional variants on handling the present situation, in which attempts could be made to ensure that there is no

actual deployment of these weapons in Europe by either side? Can you tell us a little about those options and the Government's input on them?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I cannot, really, because I do not think it falls within my ministerial responsibilities in the detail your question covers. Of course, we can come back to you with what might be considered a written cross-Whitehall answer, should you so wish. I do not think I am qualified to give the Committee a detailed reply along those lines this morning.

The Chairman: I think we are ready to move on to the two hotspots of nuclear proliferation at the moment.

Q157 **Baroness Coussins:** Good morning, Minister. In earlier answers, you touched on Iran and North Korea, which have certainly presented significant challenges to nuclear proliferation objectives. Could you spell out in a little more detail the Government's current position on these two cases, particularly how the Government are working to influence the US? Can you give us your assessment of whether the activity in Iran and North Korea represents a threat to the NPT, which, as you said—many other witnesses agree—has been a success thus far?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: It is fair to say that our influence and direct involvement is greater in the case of Iran than it is in North Korea, for obvious geographic and other reasons. We were a main party to the establishment of the JCPOA and have championed it ever since—at variance with the attitude of the United States. We think that it is and was the right thing for us to do, absolutely.

The continued development of nuclear weapons outside the P5 is clearly contrary to the NPT's aims. The UK has played, and will continue to play, a vital role in working towards a resolution of both sides alongside international partners, including the US. The NPT still plays a crucial role in providing the basis for our discussions on Iran and the DPRK. It provides a legal basis and the framework for the JCPOA.

Of course, North Korea poses an unacceptable threat to the international community. It continues to challenge the NPT's norms, so obviously we hope that the talks between President Trump and Kim Jong-un, if resumed, will provide a basis for progress. In the meantime, we believe that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA and we will do our utmost to support its continued implementation.

The Chairman: We have gone a whole 40 minutes without the dreaded word Brexit, which must be a relief to you.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Can we not continue in that vein?

Q158 **The Chairman:** We have been dealing with the hotter issues of nuclear proliferation, North Korea and the JCPOA. Is there also a European security dimension to all this? Is that affected either way by whether we are part of the EU?

Going back a little to intermediate-range weapons, is there some new European security deal that we ought to be taking a vigorous lead on to prevent us being caught up in this general atmosphere of weaker arms control?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: The implication in your question is that you are equating, or suggesting that one could equate, European institutions with our engagement with European partners on European security.

The Chairman: Yes, I probably am.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I do not think that is the case. Our co-operation on these issues will continue. The NATO dimension obviously remains, which is absolutely critical to our broader defence engagement and co-operation.

We will not be sitting around the same table, at the Council of Ministers and that kind of thing, where there is a forum for agreement on certain foreign policy issues such as sanctions. However, on sanctions, I see us almost certainly being in tandem with EU sanctions in the future through our autonomous legislation which we have put through Parliament.

I do not think the danger of damage is massive; it can be overcome. We are still in the uncertain period of not knowing quite what our relationship will be more broadly after we have left the EU. But when it comes to the big issues of international security, we will be able to maintain the kind of responsible co-operation that we want to maintain and which the world needs to see.

The Chairman: Right, that is very clear. One more treaty that is around is the Ban Treaty.

Q159 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** Good morning, Minister. The statement issued by the Government when they chose not to participate in the discussions or agree to what is known as the Ban Treaty said that it would risk 'undermining and weakening' the NPT. How would it do that?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: Because the NPT is the current regime. As I said at the beginning, I think it is working very well. It has in the past been a very important influence and force over the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. We do not think the moment is there to try to abolish nuclear weapons altogether. The right political and security conditions do not exist to allow nuclear-weapons states to relinquish their nuclear weapons. If you were to go wholesale for what you are suggesting, it would compete with the NPT in a way that would not deliver as good an outcome.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: I am not suggesting it; I am just asking the question. But undermining and standing aside are two distinct things. I am interested in how the NPT would be undermined by a country that is signed up to its criteria also signing up to the Ban Treaty.

Ms Sarah Price: There are two examples of where we believe the Ban Treaty requires states to meet a lower standard than the NPT. For safeguard agreements with the IAEA, for example, we advocate that all states should sign up to the additional protocol, which gives the IAEA a higher level of assurance that no wrongdoing is going on. The Ban Treaty has only the comprehensive safeguard agreement, which is a lower level of assurance. Then the Ban Treaty envisages a verification regime which we do not believe is adequate; it would not give anybody the assurances that disarmament had happened. That is one crucial area: it would weaken the overall ability of states to be assured that disarmament was happening.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: Thank you. We heard from the former Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, who also referred to the verification elements. But that would be if the Ban Treaty replaced the NPT wholesale. At the moment, they stand together. In the last P5 report about the Middle East and so on, which Lord Grocott referred to, there was reference also to the ASEAN powers and the South Pacific area as a nuclear-free zone. All those countries are signatory to the NPT and to the Ban Treaty. You are suggesting that them being signatory to the Ban Treaty undermines the work of the NPT.

Ms Sarah Price: The Ban Treaty has a clause in it to say that it is the primary instrument for achieving disarmament in the world. We disagree with that; we think it is the NPT. If you introduce a competition or hierarchy of treaties, you have to believe that one is higher than the other; you have to make a choice.

Q160 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** I want to move forward. One area of concern is the pace. You said that the NPT is the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. What is the UK Government's position as to when there will be a world free of nuclear weapons?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I do not think there is any straightforward answer to that question.

Ms Sarah Price: When the conditions are right. If everyone gave up their weapons tomorrow, how would we know that it had been done? How would we be assured that there were no secret stocks somewhere? How could we have the confidence to do that? I do not think The Ban Treaty gives us that.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: So there is no estimate of when it is likely to be seen to be a success.

Ms Sarah Price: There is no date, no.

Q161 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** This is my final question on this element. You have said that the NPT plays an unparalleled role in curtailing the nuclear arms race. But now we have looser language and concerns about weakness in the INF Treaty. There is also a growth in the number of countries that oppose extending the INF Treaty; as alluded to in Lord Hannay's question, China, Pakistan and so on object to it. Six countries of

the nine are refusing any extension to any of the scope for intermediate weaponry. Plus we have ongoing modernisation plans. What practical steps can be taken to start to see disarmament?

Your statement referenced specifically the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty negotiations, which do not seem to be progressing, and the fact that on the intermediate element there seems to be a wrong direction of travel as far as disarmament is concerned. What do you see as the practical steps in the immediate future to see active disarmament?

Ms Sarah Price: The INF is completely separate from the NPT. The INF has only ever been a bilateral treaty. To suggest that because other people do not like it or would not join a new one is a completely different—

Lord Purvis of Tweed: The US, presumably with our support, has had as policy the extension of the principles of the INF to other regions. Is that not correct?

Ms Sarah Price: Not that I am aware of.

Mr James Franklin: No, it is entirely a bilateral treaty.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: It was Gorbachev and Reagan, and that was that.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: I am looking at State Department reports saying that the State Department wanted it to be within Asia and China as projected.

Mr James Franklin: If you go back 10 years or so, I think even Russia had suggested there was the possibility of extending and multilateralising the INF Treaty, which China has flatly refused. Ultimately, it is a bilateral treaty.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: I am aware of that.

Mr James Franklin: That has been on the table as an option.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: If that is not an option, what are the practical steps now for active disarmament?

Ms Sarah Price: The US has come up with the 'creating the right environment' initiative, which is a way of getting people to think about how you reach it. That is very constructive. There is talk about what being a responsible nuclear state involves to build confidence and to lower tensions. We are still working on the FMCT; I know it has been going on a long time, but all multilateral arms-control treaties take many years—at least 20—to reach a conclusion. That is still on the table. We are doing a huge amount of work on verification with the US and others. That is a crucial but not very well-understood step. It is a vital part of the jigsaw to allow anyone to disarm with confidence, knowing that it was full and verifiable.

The Chairman: We have heard from some very good witnesses on

verification. It really is everything; without verification you can trust and talk as much as you like. Lord Hannay wants to pursue this.

- Q162 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** We have heard a lot of evidence on the Ban Treaty. Not a single witness has suggested that the UK should have signed it or was open to criticism for not doing so.

However, that is not the point of my question. The point of my question is whether we, along with the other P5 members, are giving rather exaggerated prominence to our dislike of the Ban Treaty, thus risking turning this year's and next year's Review Conference into a confrontation between the signatories of the Ban Treaty and the P5. That would surely not be the best way to achieve the incremental approach towards strengthening the NPT that many of our witnesses have said they would like to pursue. It is a tactical question: are we not giving undue prominence to our dislike of the Ban Treaty, which, being objective, is probably going absolutely nowhere?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I can see the point about the tactical disadvantage of unnecessary provocation. I get that. On the other hand, we want to be frank and honest and not pretend that we support something or that it will be effective when we think otherwise. There is a balance between frankness and the tactical consequences that you understandably outlined.

Ms Sarah Price: I would add that the countries that support the Ban Treaty have always maintained that they do not want to undermine the NPT, so our reply to them would be, 'Don't bring this into the NPT RevCon then'. If you do not want to undermine the NPT, do not use it as a reason to cause a breakdown at the RevCon.

- Q163 **Lord Grocott:** My question is really a variant on Lord Hannay's. We all understand why the Government have taken the position they have on the Ban Treaty, but leaving aside the specifics of the treaty itself, is it in any way valid to say that it is a reflection of a certain weariness on the part of the non-nuclear states with the nuclear states at the lack of movement towards a non-nuclear world?

The deal at the heart of the NPT is that nuclear states have weapons and the rest do not, which is in our mutual interests. Has the nuclear-weapons states' side of that equation not been fulfilling its obligations to the extent that some of the non-nuclear states might feel it ought to? What I am really saying is that, aside from than the detail, the treaty is the reflection of something rather more fundamental. The inherent argument at the heart of the NPT is not in a comfortable position. There is a feeling that there needs to be movement on this issue.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: You mean the haves and the have-nots.

Lord Grocott: Yes.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I understand that division. It goes back to the point I made earlier when I listed the aspects in which we are a responsible nuclear state. You have that on record. We would be at pains

to point out that that is the case. We labour very hard to make sure that we are responsible.

Ms Sarah Price: It is understandable that some things have been stuck. We have not yet managed to launch negotiations on the FMCT. Over the life of the NPT, there has been remarkable disarmament since the peak. I think we have reduced our nuclear capability by half. As I said, we have to take a very long-term view of these treaties and look at the reductions that have happened.

There are always peaks and troughs. In the mid-1980s, we were very worried about the nuclear arms race but we were subsequently able to carry out disarmament. Now, we are perhaps back in another trough. We also need to look at the things that have not happened, in a positive sense. It is not just about managing to keep the peace, keeping a lid on things, maintaining that taboo, limiting the number of nuclear countries and addressing those that try to break out, such as Iran and the DPRK.

Mr James Franklin: I think everyone will recognise your point. There is clearly a role for us to think about how we communicate what we have done better. In truth, we could do that better. You are right: we need to show progress on some of those issues. That does not mean that they are not tricky and will not take a very long time. How do we show progress?

It also does not mean that we are not doing other things as well as part of that. In previous rounds of this Committee, we have spoken about creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament and a world with nuclear weapons. Also, we just touched on the fact that the progress made over the past couple of years through P5 dialogues, which concern if not achieving disarmament then contributing to reducing the risk of nuclear use, is significant.

We also met as part of the P5 in the margins of the UN First Committee, where we had a fairly detailed presentation from the nations on our nuclear doctrine and policy. We continued that in Beijing at the end of January and made a commitment there to another detailed, expert-level commission. There are also plans to present that back to the conference on disarmament and give a presentation. I know that that does not meet your objective of disarmament, but a lot of other work is going on to support the overall risk-reduction process for nuclear weapons, which we need to do more on.

That brings us back to the circular argument where we started the Committee, asking about how we see the current security threat. While we recognise the NPT's important role in curtailing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we must also make sure that we are clear about the security risk and that there is a general global understanding of it. I might dare to suggest that that is not always fully understood or appreciated in every nation and by those clamouring for the 'disarmament now' message.

Q164 **The Chairman:** The final question is a follow-up to that. You kindly wrote us a letter about the P5 event in Beijing the other day, chaired by the Chinese. Were you present?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: No.

Mr James Franklin: I was, although Philip Barton was the lead.

The Chairman: First of all, did you get a sense that the Chinese are much more seriously involved in these matters now than hitherto? Secondly, did you get a sense that the P5 recognises the point we just discussed: that this is a question of carrying all non-nuclear states in a common purpose, that everyone has an interest in keeping the situation as it is, even with the four or five non-legal holders, and that further proliferation would be a disaster for everybody—not just nuclear states but the whole galère of signatories to the NPT?

Mr James Franklin: I can give you the reflection of someone who was there. I think it is fair to say that, under their presidency, the Chinese have seen a big push on their commitment to engagement with the P5. They are working through the NPT. Strengthening the NPT arrangements was the theme of the conference. Again, we have kicked off other work that has not been mentioned yet on the nuclear glossary. Again, that will support the long-term process, which the Chinese have very much started leading on. They put an awful lot of focus and effort into managing that process through the P5 conference. So I think the answer to your question would be yes.

The action for us is to see how we continue that through our presidency when we take over after the PrepCom in April. Yes, I think it would be fair to say, without getting in trouble with my Foreign Office colleagues, that we could look at how to bring the nuclear-weapons states into that process—although not directly involving them in it, because it is important that we can carry out our P5 dialogues safely. We are discussing a number of avenues to ensure a better reflection and appreciation of that conversation on what is happening with the non-nuclear-weapons states.

Sir Alan Duncan MP: As I understand it, perhaps one can point to a tangible outcome of that meeting: UNSC consensus on the DPRK.

Q165 **The Chairman:** Good. That leaves us with one positive twist. We are really grateful to you for sparing time for us this morning. We do not want to misinterpret anything that has been said, but we are left with a slight sense of unease. After previous arms negotiations between Russia and the United States, there was always a start to some new treaty. Now, there is no beginning of any new nuclear disarmament treaty. On the contrary, all the existing treaties either seem to be in abeyance or are not being pursued. Actually, in INF's case, it is coming apart.

In looking at these matters, we see that the Government face the major task of reducing that unease and reassuring people that we are not heading into another spiral of rearmament of the kind that threatened us

before the arms control treaties of the past century. Can we have a final comment on that from you?

Sir Alan Duncan MP: I would like, if possible, to leave you in a slightly more optimistic mood. Certainly, I would make the point that rather than saying that there are no negotiations to get something going, we should use our voice perhaps to point out the importance of compliance, a lack of which is undermining the INF at the moment. There will be plans once the START treaty finishes in 2021.

Mr James Franklin: The New START runs until 2021. The US has not come out and said that it will rescind that. There will be a dialogue in the US; it is not for us to comment on that process. The New START has a period to run. If you look at the history of how previous iterations of that treaty have been negotiated, the negotiating process started before and ran over. I suspect that the US is running an interagency process to look at the future of arms control.

We have to be careful about just saying that the answer is a replacement of the New START. As I hinted at to begin with, a number of new weapons systems exist, particularly on the Russian side, which are not currently covered by the New START. Assuming that the answer is just to extend the New START is dangerous, because it leaves a number of difficult systems uncapped. We are looking at a period between now and 2021 where there will be intense discussion between international parties about what the future of arms control looks like. I do not think it is quite as bleak as you presented in your opening gambit.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I just want to question a little a number of the points you made there, the first that it is not our business to comment on these bilateral agreements entered into by the United States. That is surely a little simplistic? After all, we will be fundamentally affected by whatever judgments the United States comes to. Since it is supposed to be our principal ally, we are presumably in a position to convey our views about these matters without interfering in its affairs.

That is the first point. The second point is this: you say that the Russians are developing all sorts of weapons systems that are not caught by the New START. I am sure that you are right, but in what way would our position as a country be improved if the cap on strategic weapons in the New START simply evaporated?

Mr James Franklin: I have two points. If I implied that we do not have a role in speaking to the US and influencing its position on the future of arms control, which has a big play-out for European security, I should probably apologise. We absolutely do and we will continue as part of our dialogue with the US to have conversations about that, both bilaterally and multilaterally in a number of different forums. We need to recognise that at the end of the day the treaty between the United States and Russia will still be bilateral. Ultimately, that will be a decision for the President of the United States, but yes, I agree that we have a role to play in that process.

On the second part of your question, this is a chance to understand that a cap on strategic weapons is an important part of global strategic stability, clearly, but it is not the only thing we need to think about. We need to look at the US position, which reflects the analysis that came out in the NPR on so-called tactical nuclear weapons. I hate that term and I apologise for using it, because surely any nuclear weapon is strategic.

This is about how to provide that balance. Should we look at just strategic warhead numbers or different types of warhead numbers? Should we look at delivery systems? We need to reflect a number of avenues. Yes, strategic warhead numbers are one, but if we just make that the ceiling, it will not deliver the strategic stability we all want to see.

The Chairman: There we are. We must call a halt here. Thank you very much for your time and your assessments of the situation. Selling step-by-step strategies to an impatient world is never easy; the Minister will know that more than most. Thank you very much for being with us. We really appreciate it.