

Northern Friends Peace Board – Written evidence (NPT0019)

1. What is Your Evaluation of the Current Level of Risk?

Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) views the current level of risk as very high and higher than for some years. The Doomsday Clock for 2018 was set by the Atomic Scientist Bulletin at 2 minutes to midnight, which is the highest since 1953. The Chatham House 2016 report to the United Nations Open Ended Working Group stated that nuclear weapons are a threat to human security and survival and an extremely serious danger to all aspects of human well-being.

NFPB considers that the reasons for this heightened risk include the aggressive rhetoric, instant and ill-considered communications by social media and volatile unpredictability of the current President of the United States. More widely, there has been in some states an increase in both militarisation and aggressive nationalism, pandered to by both democratic leaders and dictators to strengthen their popularity and support. The continued presence of nuclear weapons in politically volatile regions, notably the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent is another factor increasing the current level of risk.

While nuclear weapons are deployed and targeted, there is an ever present risk of a nuclear war being started by accident, as very nearly happened in 1983 when a Soviet satellite nuclear early warning system malfunctioned. An unimaginable disaster was only avoided because the Russian officer on duty disobeyed orders and did not launch a retaliatory nuclear strike.

2. Ahead of the 2020 Review conference of the Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty (NPT), what are the biggest challenges facing global nuclear diplomacy?

The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons signed in July 2017 is a very positive development, strengthening, focussing and re-energising the demand to eliminate nuclear weapons both among the majority of non-nuclear weapon states and in civil society throughout the world. By far the biggest challenge is to encourage the existing nuclear weapons states to engage with this process and make a serious attempt to fulfil their obligations under the NPT to work towards the elimination of nuclear weapons rather than to actively obstruct it and to persuade or coerce their allies to do likewise.

Other very serious problems are the possibility of the US president reneging on the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia, which has successfully maintained some balance since 1987 and his withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear deal of 2015. Both these developments are very worrying challenges to nuclear weapons limitation diplomacy and show the weakness of limitation as opposed to prohibition leading to elimination.

Another persistent obstacle to weapons disarmament, including nuclear weapons, is the very great influence of the large and wealthy arms industry lobby, especially in the nuclear powers of USA, Russia, China, UK, France and Israel.

a. To what extent do states view the NPT as relevant ?

The highly influential and successful International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) highlighted the appalling humanitarian consequences of nuclear war and preparations for it. The impact on the leaders of most states in the world resulting from information provided through civil society led to the United Nations Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) adopted in July 2017. The ICAN movement and the commitment to the TPNW prove how determined the majority of non-nuclear weapon states are to eliminate nuclear weapons and how frustrated they have been at the total lack of progress made by the nuclear weapons states in meeting their obligation to disarm in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty in the almost 50 years since it came into force in 1968. The signatories to TPNW see it as a means of bringing compliance with the obligations of the NPT.

The majority of nuclear-armed states that are signatories to the NPT are keen to enforce the measures included against nuclear proliferation but they have consistently failed in their obligation to progress with nuclear weapons disarmament themselves. The Northern Friends Peace Board calls on the UK Government to become a party to the TPNW in order to fulfil its NPT obligations.

b. What are the prospects for the other components of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ?

Although it has not entered formally into force, the CTBT has helped slow the nuclear arms race and further negotiations may take place. However, without the total prohibition which the TPNW is aiming for, important gains are easily lost. NFPB urges the UK Government to take a positive attitude to the TPNW and to engage in meaningful discussions on how the TPNW will impact on UK foreign policy. As a contributor to the harm inflicted by nuclear testing, the UK Government should contribute to compensation for and mitigation of the harm inflicted in areas where nuclear weapons have been tested.

c. How important are these agreements to the wider rules- based international order?

These agreements are central to and vital for the rule-based international order. They are especially important when the leaders of many states and international military alliances, notably NATO and the Coalition led by Saudi Arabia, have moved away from a focus on obtaining diplomatic solutions to conflicts and disputes, with a greater reliance on wars and military coercion to achieve their perceived aims. The increasing profits from and influence of the massive international Arms Trade lobby has been a factor in this shift.

d. To what extent does the existence of three armed states outside the NPT (India, Pakistan and Israel) destabilise the overall regime?

We consider that these states have developed nuclear weapons because they follow the argument used by nuclear-armed states for maintaining possession of them. Clearly it would be preferable if these 3 states signed up to the NPT, but it would only make a big difference if the nuclear weapons states who have signed made genuine progress in their obligation to eliminate nuclear weapons. Acceptance of the TPNW and progress in implementing it could dramatically improve the chances of India and Pakistan both agreeing to disarm their nuclear weapons, since the costs of these weapons are a drain on their resources. If there were no prospects of other Middle

East states deploying weapons of mass destruction, this might provide an environment in which the Israeli state might consider nuclear disarmament.

e. What prospects are there for a Middle East WMD free zone?

The establishment of a WMD zone in this highly volatile area, which has been responsible in recent years for a disproportionately high level of wars and military conflicts and also of investment in weapons and military infrastructure, would be an enormous step forward in creating a safer and more peaceful world. NFPB calls on the UK Government to contribute in this very difficult task by ceasing to support wars and military action by its allies in the region, notably Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States in their devastating war on Yemen, and greatly strengthen condemnation of Israel for its military attacks on Gaza. Linked to this should be a moratorium on arms sales to all States in the region. By exporting missiles, war planes and other weapons to the region on a massive scale, the UK is strongly contributing to the frequent wars, instability and vast human suffering in the Middle East.

3. To what extent will the United States withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, as well as US efforts to achieve the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, affect the wider nuclear non –proliferation regime?

NFPB regrets the US withdrawal from the Iran deal, which ramps up tensions in the already volatile Middle East region and is a blow against weapons control diplomacy in general. NFPB believes the UK should deplore this US action in the strongest terms. The extent to which the US withdrawal will be damaging depends on the success that the other signatories – Russia, China, UK, France, Germany and the European Union - have in continuing to support the agreement and in moderating the Iranian response to US provocation.

In early 2018, the very aggressive threats and counter threats being exchanged between the US and North Korean Governments combined with provocative military exercises created a very high level of tension and a dangerous situation, threatening the safety of all the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula and their neighbours and alarming political leaders and citizens throughout the world. Fortunately, the South Korean President worked hard for peaceful resolutions and the meetings of the North Korean President with the leaders of South Korea, China and most importantly the USA brought a very welcome reduction in hostility and tensions, creating openings for further diplomacy. This was an object lesson to all about the value of diplomacy and seeking agreements and the extremely dangerous nature of nuclear brinkmanship in the modern world. As such, it is likely to have given a boost to the TPNW process. However, beyond the near future, there are dangers of this conflict reigniting unless concrete progress is made for a peace treaty between North and South Korea and an agreement to denuclearise the Korean peninsula. NFPB calls on the UK government to contribute positively in these negotiations and to ensure that the voices of Korean people are heeded.

4. To what extent and why are existing nuclear arms agreements being challenged, particularly the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), and what prospect is there for further such agreements? What prospects are there of progress in negotiating a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty?

Heightened risks include the aggressive rhetoric, instant and ill-considered communications and volatile unpredictability of some leaders. More widely (as mentioned above), there has been in some states an increase in both militarisation and aggressive nationalism. The withdrawal of the USA from the INF treaty makes the maintenance of existing agreements harder. The adoption of the TPNW and the wide participation in its negotiating conference have increased and are increasing awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that any nuclear war or accident would bring. This has strengthened the determination of the majority of non-nuclear states to insist that the nuclear-armed states address their obligation to disarm seriously and urgently. NFPB calls on the UK Government to commit fully to protecting all existing agreements, to supporting negotiations for new treaties such as the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty and to sign the TPNW and to work to eliminate all nuclear weapons.

5. What effect will nuclear renewal programmes have on the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime? To what extent could technological developments - including in missile capabilities, warhead strength and verification – undermine existing non- proliferation and arms control agreements.

Upgrading and renewing nuclear weapon systems is heading in the opposite direction than disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons. New technology threatens more instability and risk as it alters the balance of forces and precipitates new arms races. There is also the danger that new systems involving more automation may increase the risk of catastrophic accidents by delaying the possibility of human intervention at an early stage in any malfunction. NFPB calls on the UK Government to cancel the Trident renewal programme, as a first commitment towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

6. To what extent will technological developments, both directly relating to nuclear weapons and in the wider defence and security sphere, affect nuclear diplomacy?

Reliance on computer systems increases the risk of disruption or hacking by enemy states or by non-state actors, thus increasing uncertainty and insecurity. Drones can make nuclear weapons easier to detect and identify. Improved technology cannot enhance safety and security except when used in the verification of weapons control and limitation agreements. The UK Government can contribute the latter by joining the TPNW.

7. If it were to enter into force, how would the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear weapons (the Ban Treaty) affect efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and bring about disarmament?

NFPB believes the coming into force of the Ban Treaty will prove that very many non-nuclear armed states expect real progress on disarmament by the nuclear armed states. As support for TPNW grows, frustration at any lack of progress from nuclear armed states will grow. The TPNW process improves the prospects for nuclear disarmament, including within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The TPNW negotiations have enhanced awareness of the harmful consequences of manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons and the catastrophic consequences

of their use. Nuclear weapons are widely seen as being in breach of International Humanitarian Law and their prohibition will make their acquisition and deployment unacceptable. The adoption of the TPNW has already led more than 50 financial institutions to divest from nuclear weapons and this response is growing in strength.

8. What are the policies of other P5 countries (China, France, Russia and USA) and the UK's other partners on the Non- Proliferation treaty and on nuclear weapons more generally? How effective has the P5 process been, and what role will it have in the future?

The lack of transparency disguises differences of approach between these states. Acting as a group, they appear to block progress at NPT negotiations and collectively oppose the TPNW. However, the P5 countries did work constructively to negotiate the Iran deal, now threatened by the US withdrawal. The UK has risked distancing itself from allies who want to see nuclear weapons eliminated.

9. How effective a role has the UK played in global nuclear diplomacy in recent years? How could the UK more effectively engage on nuclear non - proliferation and disarmament? What should the UK government's priorities be ahead of the 2020 NPT Review Conference?

The UK has not been effective in progressing nuclear disarmament. It has followed its US allies in blocking progress at NPT negotiations and in opposing the development of the TPNW. Despite a stated intention to oppose any prospects of proliferation, the UK has lost credibility through its plan to upgrade rather than scrap its own Trident nuclear weapons. The exception to this negative record is the creditable effort by the UK working with the other signatories to maintain the deal with Iran.

NFPB believes that the UK Government should seriously and urgently take steps to honour its commitment to disarmament under the NPT provisions and should also sign and ratify the TPNW and work towards the elimination of all nuclear weapons. These steps would involve foreign policy changes, including assessing its relations with the US, and co-operating closely with all those countries seeking to eliminate nuclear weapons and to develop structures to resolve conflicts and disputes by diplomatic rather than by military means. At the very least, the UK Government should respect and take seriously the clearly expressed views of the Scottish Government and people by including a representative of the Scottish Government in its delegation to the NPT preparative conference in May.

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