GLOBAL STRATEGY FORUM

# VIEWS ON THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION DEBATE - THE CRITICAL ISSUE OF OUR TIME?

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, LECTURES AND DEBATES

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# FOREWORD

If I had been writing this foreword a few years ago it would have been with a great sense of pessimism that we were trying to push water uphill. When, four years ago in the House of Commons, I spoke and voted against the renewal of our Trident nuclear deterrent I was treated with disbelief by many of my colleagues. My point then was that the world was moving on, that nuclear deterrence was at best a blunt instrument and in any event, it was less and less credible that in our increasingly global world anyone other than a lunatic would use it, and a lunatic would not be deterred.

It is with a greater sense of optimism that I approach the subject now. Whereas those few years ago the attitude to non-proliferation was to try and stop other countries obtaining the technology (which singularly failed in relation to Pakistan and India) while gradually reducing our own capabilities - an Augustine variant of 'give me nuclear chastity but not yet' - there is now a genuine desire amongst the older nuclear powers to see substantial reductions leading in time to a nuclear free world. What was a long-term objective is now becoming a more immediate one, encouraged by the genuine desire and intent of President Obama to move in that direction. Where previously there were albeit honeyed words, there is now a genuine sense of will; and it will take a real will on the part of statesmen across the world to bring this about.

The challenges still remain and they are daunting. Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal and refusal to sign up to the NPT casts a shadow across the Middle East which is now more than mirrored by the attempts of Iran to achieve nuclear military capacity. North Korea still poses a threat to the stability of the eastern Pacific not least because the 'lunatic' element could come into play there. India and Pakistan, while they have at last developed something of a restraining nuclear doctrine still create their own tensions in regard to any prospect of scaling down nuclear arsenals towards zero.

And then there is the terrorist threat, the possibility of fundamentalist terrorist groups obtaining nuclear material sufficient at least to build a dirty bomb if not a fully-fledged nuclear weapon. All of these remain dark spots upon the horizon, but if the general climate moves past non-proliferation towards reduction and eventually elimination then these individual elements will become easier to address.

The key to the change of atmosphere in this whole nuclear area has been driven by some exceptional statesmen from across the world who have appreciated that movement will take time to reach fruition but that the time for moving starts now.

This booklet encompasses some of these views, in articles written for and lectures given to Global Strategy Forum of which I am honoured to be Chairman. They reflect only a small amount of the debate which is now taking place and of the work being done. I very much welcome their publication.

**Lord Lothian PC QC DL**
**Chairman, Global Strategy Forum**
**April 2012**

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# NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION THREATS TO BRITISH SECURITY

**by PETER JENKINS CMG**

*Peter Jenkins CMG joined the British Diplomatic Service in 1973, after graduating from Cambridge with a degree in Classical Philosophy and spending two years at the Harvard Graduate School for Arts and Sciences as a Harkness Fellow. His diplomatic career took him to Vienna (twice), Washington, Paris, Brasilia and Geneva. In Washington he was Private Secretary to two Ambassadors. In Paris he promoted Franco-British economic and energy ties and dealt with issues arising from the creation of a European single market. After a spell contributing to a strengthening of Anglo-Brazilian political and economic relations post-1993, he became the UK's chief representative to the WTO in the run-up to the launch of the Doha Round. In 2001 he was made Ambassador to the IAEA and other UN organisations in Vienna. There his primary focus was on the nuclear aspects of international peace and security, especially the Iranian nuclear issue. Having left the Diplomatic Service in 2006, he worked for the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership in Vienna and advised the Director of the International Institute for Applies Systems Analysis. He is now an associate fellow of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and a qualified civil and commercial mediator. He has joined forces with former colleagues to form ADRgAmbassadors, an international mediation and corporate diplomacy partnership.*

Over the last 40 years the threat to British security from nuclear proliferation has been sharply reduced by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which entered into force in 1970. In the 1960s it was common to fear that by 2010 twenty or more states would possess nuclear weapons. Instead when the first day of 2010 dawned, only nine states were known to possess nuclear weapons, the five Nuclear Weapon States recognised under the NPT (US, UK, France, Russia and China) and four nuclear-armed states: Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea).

Among the other instruments and mechanisms that have reinforced the effect of the NPT, (a) nuclear-weapon-free zones have come to be seen as valuable adjuncts. They now cover all of Latin America, Africa, Central Asia, South East Asia, and the Pacific. In other words, some two thirds of the states that make up the membership of the United Nations have pledged to regional partners and neighbours that they will not develop nuclear weapons. (b) The Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Proliferation Security Initiative have made it harder for states to acquire the equipment they would need to produce the fissile material that forms the core of nuclear weapons. And (c) the bilateral application of persuasive pressure by the US brought at least two suspected nuclear weapon programmes to an early end in the 70's.

Consequently, when Britain's new coalition government produced a national security strategy in the summer of 2010, it was able to judge that the likelihood of a nuclear attack on the UK by another state was low. It may, nonetheless, be instructive to review current and recent nuclear proliferation concerns, such as they are or have been, and to consider briefly any implications for future policy.

In the nuclear proliferation sphere the notion of threat is complex. At a simple level threats are a function of four capacities: the capacity to produce fissile material; the capacity to design and engineer nuclear explosive devices; the capacity to produce their means of delivery; and the capacity to supply other states or "non-state actors" (terrorists) with devices or the means to construct devices.

The nuclear facilities that most concern threat analysts are plants that enrich uranium by feeding it in gaseous form through cascades of centrifuge machines, and plants that subject spent (irradiated) uranium reactor fuel to chemical processes, to separate the plutonium created by nuclear reactions. Enrichment plants and reprocessing plants produce the highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium from which nuclear explosive devices can be made. Reactors are only a potential threat insofar as reactor cores produce plutonium as a by-product – some more efficiently than others.

On a more sophisticated view, capacity is only one element in the threat equation; motive and intention, and political risk, are also important. Brazil is capable of producing HEU, is known to have worked on the design of weapons under a military regime, and has potential nuclear weapon delivery systems. But US threat analysts do not lie awake worrying about these Brazilian capabilities because Brazil has no discernible motive for harnessing its enrichment technology to the production of nuclear weapons or for the benefit of other states or terrorists; there is no evidence that Brazil's leaders have any intention of going down that path; and the risk of those leaders being replaced by leaders who would have radically different intentions is very low. Furthermore, Brazil is a party to the NPT and to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the legal basis for the Latin American nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ).

Sometimes the intentions and motives of other states are hard to read, and their domestic political outlook hard to predict. Intelligence agencies tend to find it easier to gather information about attempts to acquire capacities than about why leaders want a particular capacity or the use they intend to make of it. And the agencies' intelligence-gathering record when it comes to predicting political risk leaves something to be desired.

Consequently, analysts have to settle sometimes for a compromise between the simple and the sophisticated. When news reaches State A that the government of State B is seeking to acquire a capacity of concern, analysts in State A ask themselves whether government B is best seen as friendly or unfriendly. If unfriendly then A's tendency is to assume the worst – that the capacity will be used to harm A's interests – and to see that capacity as a threat. Assuming the worst is of course prudent. It is safer for governments to over-insure than to be taken by surprise or seen as ingenuous. It is a poor substitute, though, for informed policy-making, and can entail massive costs.

These abstractions are a necessary preamble to two important points. The gravity of a given nuclear

proliferation risk is a matter of judgement; and that judgement is crucially influenced by assessment of such intangibles as motives and intentions, friendliness and unfriendliness, and political risk.

## IRAN

Iran possesses a capacity to produce small quantities of HEU, enough perhaps for two weapons a year, but is thought not yet to have done so. It is working to improve this capacity, notably by developing more efficient centrifuge machines; progress, however, has been slow, much slower than was expected in 2005, when Iran walked away from its agreement with the UK and others to suspend uranium enrichment. Iran possesses potential nuclear weapon delivery systems. There is growing evidence of past, possibly present, research work relevant to the construction of nuclear explosive devices.

However, the motives and intentions of Iran's leaders have been and remain obscure. The most likely hypothesis, the one that best fits available evidence, is that they seek only a threshold or break-out nuclear weapon capability, which they judge to be consistent with respecting their NPT obligations, since the NPT does not prohibit uranium enrichment or nuclear weapons research, and consistent with the past practice of certain other NPT parties. A threshold capability is the wherewithal to produce a small number of weapons in an emergency to deter a potential aggressor, perhaps after withdrawal from the NPT in accordance with Article X of the treaty.

Not only does this hypothesis best fit available facts, there are grounds to think the alternative – producing nuclear weapons – unlikely. It would show disregard for a public ban on the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran's Supreme Leader, putting at risk his authority. It would entail a very serious breach of Iran's NPT commitments – much more serious than Iran's past safeguards violations – costing Iran its relations with all but a handful of members of the global community, including Russia and China. It would increase the risk of an Israeli or US attack. It would lead to the imposition of much harsher economic sanctions. It would bring no obvious benefit, since Iranian security and Iranian prestige are adequately enhanced by being thought to possess a latent threshold capability.

On 2 December 2010 Prime Minister Putin said on Larry King Live that Russia had no reason to think that Iran aspired to possess nuclear weapons. In February 2011 the US Director of National Intelligence testified that the US intelligence community assessed Iran to be keeping open the option of developing nuclear weapons, but to have yet to decide to build such weapons, and to be likely to be guided in any such decision by "cost-benefit" calculations.

Until such a decision is taken, the widespread assumption that Iran's nuclear programme is in violation of the NPT and is a threat to the security of other states owes much to the image of Iran's Islamic leaders in the popular imagination, and to the fact that the programme is a threat to the political interests of two of Iran's regional rivals, Saudi Arabia and Israel. (A third regional rival, Turkey, has so far chosen to see the programme neither as a security nor as a political threat.)

What, though, of the risk that Iran will make its nuclear know-how or nuclear material available to other states or to non-state actors? Former Prime Minister Blair is among those who advocate a military strike on Iran to avert this risk. He claims repressive regimes possessing WMD are bound to make them available to terrorist groups.

Fortunately there are no grounds to consider this to be what logicians call a necessary truth. It is now clear that it did not hold true in the case of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In the case of Iran, there is no evidence that Iran has transferred nuclear know-how or material to other states or non-state actors since it acquired the ability to do so, despite its longstanding ties to Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. Nor is there evidence that it has ever passed material for a "dirty bomb" to Hezbollah, although it could have done so at any time in the last 30 years.

## PAKISTAN

Pakistan, one of only three states never to have adhered to the NPT, has been nuclear-armed since 1998, at least. It can produce large quantities of HEU, and it possesses delivery systems. It is thought to possess upwards of 70 nuclear devices. Ongoing grounds for proliferation concern are two-fold: that Pakistani nuclear material or devices may fall into the hands of terrorists groups, and that Pakistan may supply devices to Saudi Arabia. (Pakistan could supply Saudi Arabia without breaching the NPT since it is not a party. For Saudi Arabia to acquire devices, however, would be a very serious breach of its NPT obligations.)

The first of these concerns is a function of political risk. Rapid population growth, economic weaknesses, corrupt elites, ethnic separatism, Islamic fundamentalism, the Kashmiri dispute, and tensions resulting from Pakistani links to Afghan Pashtuns make for an unpredictable future. Although Pakistan's stocks of fissile material and nuclear devices are guarded by elite elements of Pakistan's strongest institution, the army, it is not impossible to conceive of ways in which this will not suffice to deny material or even devices to Islamic groups hostile to the UK.

For years it has been rumoured that Pakistan is committed to making devices available to Saudi Arabia in case of need (in return for Saudi financial support for the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme). There may or may not be truth to this. If there is, the onus rests on Saudi Arabia's closest ally, the US, to forestall any Saudi sense of insecurity and to remind Saudi Arabia of its NPT obligations.

In addition, Pakistan is still home to A.Q. Khan, the nuclear engineer whose illicit network supplied nuclear know-how and equipment to Iran, the DPRK and Libya, in circumvention of Nuclear Supplier Group restrictions. Khan was placed under house arrest in 2004. But the extent to which this was merely a gesture, a way of placating the US, UK and some other Western states, is unclear. If Pakistan's relations with the US continue to deteriorate, it cannot be assumed that Khan will remain sidelined. There has been, however, some tightening of NSG restrictions since he was at his most active.

## NORTH KOREA

The DPRK is another nuclear-armed state. It not only possesses at least one small enrichment plant and the capacity to produce small quantities of plutonium by reprocessing spent fuel; it also possesses an estimated 60-70kg of plutonium (enough for 12-13 warheads) and potential short and medium range delivery systems. It has demonstrated that it knows how to build nuclear devices, albeit crude ones in the view of students of the DPRK's two nuclear explosions (2006 and 2009).

From a proliferation perspective the DPRK picture is mixed. On the positive side, security is so tight in North Korea that there is little risk of theft from DPRK nuclear facilities. And the DPRK depends economically on China to such an extent that China is in a position to exert a restraining influence, and appears fitfully to do so. On the other hand, the DPRK is thought to have helped Syria to build a reactor that was bombed in 2007 (see below), it has made missile technology available to Iran, and it has been suspected of nuclear cooperation with Myanmar. Moreover, although the DPRK is not known to have helped terrorists to acquire nuclear material, one could imagine DPRK leaders selling material to terrorists, if the price were right and if they thought a transaction might remain undetected.

North Korea is the only NPT party, since the treaty entered into force in 1970, to have joined the ranks of the nuclear-armed (Israel became nuclear-armed before 1970, and chose not to become an NPT party; India and Pakistan never became parties). Not enough is known about DPRK decision-making for it to be possible to know why NPT membership failed to inhibit the acquisition of nuclear weapons. It seems possible that DPRK leaders calculated that they were already so isolated internationally that they had little to lose by violating NPT norms. Even so, it is probable that their withdrawal from the treaty in 2003 (though on formal grounds their withdrawal is considered invalid) was timed to precede their embarking on the production of nuclear devices.

## SYRIA

In September 2007 Israeli aircraft destroyed a building in a remote Syrian location. The IAEA has since concluded that the building housed a small nuclear reactor that was nearing completion or had recently started up. The reactor would have been capable of irradiating uranium from which plutonium could have been extracted. Syria should have declared the reactor to the IAEA prior to the start of construction but had not done so. This was a relatively minor breach of Syria's NPT obligations. The Assad regime has not admitted that its intention was to produce nuclear weapons, a much more serious breach.

Successive Directors General of the IAEA have complained that Israel, an IAEA member, should have reported the Syrian reactor to the IAEA instead of taking matters into its own hands. Had the Israelis done so, the IAEA would have demanded a special inspection of the site, and Syria would have been under massive peer group pressure to place the reactor under IAEA safeguards, in accordance with the NPT.

## LIBYA AND IRAQ

Libya surrendered a rudimentary enrichment programme to the US after the Gadhafi regime was caught in flagrante trying to import centrifuge machines, thanks to US knowledge of Libyan links to AQ Khan's supply network and to the Proliferation Security Initiative.

As former IAEA Director General El Baradei says in "The Age of Deception", this Libyan nuclear programme was no more than "nascent"… "its importance inflated to score political points". Nonetheless, since Libya admitted that its goal was to develop nuclear weapons, the programme's early termination must be ranked as a counter-proliferation success. It should be credited to the US ability to arrange for the interception of the centrifuge cargo, since till that point Gadhafi was loath to admit the programme's existence to US and UK interlocutors.

Iraq ceased to be a nuclear threat in the 1990's, when the UN Security Council required the surrender of all its fissile material production equipment and related material. Fissile material production know-how remained, some assume, in the minds of Iraqi engineers, but no use was made of it. El Baradei proved right to stress, in reporting to the UN Security Council on 7 March 2003, that there was no evidence of Iraqi efforts to revive the nuclear weapons programme.

What inhibited Saddam from ordering a resumption of the programme after the departure of UN inspectors in 1998, is not known; or, if it is, has not been made public. However, Saddam's earlier readiness to ignore Iraq's NPT obligations suggests that the treaty is unlikely to have been an inhibitor in this case.

The only other state to have fallen under Western suspicion in the last decade, despite its adherence to the NPT and to the South East Asian NWFZ agreement, is Myanmar.

Concerns have been aroused by information from opposition groups and from a Burmese defector. They have been fuelled by surprising procurement attempts and by rumours of nuclear contacts with the DPRK. However, many Western experts consider this evidence as either unreliable or too sparse to permit an accurate assessment.

In June Myanmar's Vice-President told a visiting US delegation that Myanmar had halted its "nuclear research" programme "to avoid any misunderstanding". It seems possible that Myanmar's leaders had been made aware that halting the programme would be a pre-condition for a thaw in relations with the US.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is reason to think that the NPT has been a highly effective counter-proliferation instrument. Only one NPT party, North Korea, has violated the core NPT obligation: to refrain from manufacturing or otherwise acquiring nuclear weapons – and that almost certainly after withdrawing, albeit controversially, from the treaty. And only two others, Libya and Iraq, have given UN/IAEA inspectors reason to feel sure that these NPT

parties intended to violate that core obligation.

So the British government is right to attach the highest importance to preserving the NPT. For this, steady progress towards the goal of nuclear disarmament is essential, as it would be unwise to assume that NPT Non-Nuclear-Weapon States (NNWS) are ready to tolerate prolonged absence of movement in that direction. As it happens, the advent of powerful conventional weapons that can fulfil most of the missions ascribed to nuclear weapons by the US and Russia provides a relevant opportunity, provided both states can find ways of reassuring each other during a transitional phase.

Preserving the NPT also means recognising that many Non-Aligned states are attached to what they see as NPT rights. Since the NPT entered into force the US has been trying to restrict the use of enrichment and reprocessing technologies by NNWS, despite the absence of any prohibition on their use in the treaty. There is logic in these attempts, clearly, but they cause resentment because they are seen as attempts to widen the treaty's scope without the consent of the affected.

This resentment lies behind Non-Aligned uneasiness over Western moves to coerce Iran into abandoning enrichment through sanctions, and behind Russian and Chinese doubts about the wisdom of these tactics (so far ineffective, in any case). In future it would be more consistent with the UK interest in preserving the NPT to rely on persuasion/negotiation to limit the spread of sensitive nuclear technologies, or on developing support for fuel cycle centres under multinational control, or on IAEA safeguards to provide early warning of technology abuse, as envisaged by the framers of the NPT.

Meanwhile, it would be sensible for the UK to recognise that Iran cannot be coerced into abandoning enrichment; to cut UK losses (the Iran premium on the price of crude oil and the financial consequences of the ban on Western support for boosting Iranian oil output); and to revert to handling the Iranian nuclear programme in accordance with the NPT and the IAEA statute.

The absence of any proliferation concerns in the regions covered by NWFZs (apart, marginally, from South East Asia – cf. Myanmar) may or may not be coincidental. Experience, though, suggests that peer group pressure is an effective inhibitor. So continued UK support for the creation and maintenance of such zones would be advisable.

South West Asia (aka the Middle East) is the biggest gap in the current patchwork of zones. Iran first proposed a Middle East NWFZ in the early 70s. Iran continues to be a proponent, though the leading advocate is now Egypt. Opposition has been coming exclusively from Israel. The absence of means to induce Israel to recognise the value of a Middle East zone is regrettable.

A useful stopgap alternative would a NWFZ covering the states that border the Persian (Arabian) Gulf. Saudi/Iranian mutual distrust and rivalry are currently at such a pitch that this must seem a tall order. It looks more achievable, though, given sufficient diplomatic effort by the UK and Western allies, including Turkey, than overcoming Israeli resistance to a Middle East zone.

It is the risk of terrorists acquiring nuclear material or nuclear devices through the collapse of Pakistani state institutions that appears to pose the greatest threat to UK security in the foreseeable future, although there is some comfort to be drawn from the view of at least one expert that the Pakistani state can be compared to a raft, leaky but almost unsinkable. Reducing that risk calls for policy responses that extend well beyond the nuclear sphere, and therefore beyond the scope of this paper.

The 2010 National Security Strategy finding, with which this paper's author concurs, that the likelihood of a state nuclear attack on the UK is low, gives rise to at least two difficult questions. Is it wise for NATO to support the construction of an anti-Iranian missile system in the Eastern Mediterranean, given the low likelihood of an Iranian nuclear attack and given potential for this project to cause lasting damage to NATO relations with Russia? And will an economically-straitened UK be justified in spending tens of billions of pounds on renewing a submarine-launched nuclear deterrent?

December 2011

# NUCLEAR WEAPONS: THE STATE OF PLAY

## Text of a lecture by PROFESSOR THE HON GARETH EVANS AO QC

***Professor the Hon Gareth Evans AO QC*** *has been Chancellor of the Australian National University since January 2010; a Professorial Fellow at The University of Melbourne since July 2009, and is President Emeritus of the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, which he led from 2000-2009. He previously spent 21 years in Australian politics, thirteen of them as a Cabinet Minister. As Foreign Minister (1988-96) he was best known internationally for his roles in developing the UN peace plan for Cambodia, concluding the Chemical Weapons Convention, and initiating new Asia Pacific regional economic and security architecture. He has written or edited nine books, most recently The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and for All, published by the Brookings Institution in 2008; and has published over 100 journal articles and chapters on foreign relations, human rights and legal and constitutional reform. He has co-chaired two major International Commissions on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2000-01); and Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (2008-10) whose report Eliminating Nuclear Threats was published in December 2009, and a member of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004), the Blix Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction (2006), the Zedillo Commission of Eminent Persons on The Role of the IAEA to 2020 and Beyond (2008) and the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Committee on Genocide Prevention. He is Co-Chair of the International Advisory Board of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. In May 2010 Gareth Evans was awarded the 2010 Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute/Roosevelt Stichting Four Freedoms Award for Freedom from Fear, for his pioneering work on the Responsibility to Protect concept, and his contributions to conflict prevention and resolution, arms control and disarmament.*

## THE GOOD NEWS

The good news about nuclear weapons, and there is some, is that, after a decade of sleepwalking, there really has been a high-level political effort made over the last three to four years to jolt policymakers and publics into confronting the reality that unless we seriously commit to complete disarmament - to getting all the way to zero - there is a very real risk that the planet as we know it will not survive, and that that effort has borne some fruit.

The first high-profile effort to shock the world out of its complacency was made by four of the hardest-nosed realists ever to hold public office - former US Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, Secretary of Defense William Perry, and Senator Sam Nunn - in their famous series of Wall Street Journal articles since 2007 arguing that whatever role nuclear weapons may have played in the Cold War, in the present international environment the risks of any state retaining them far outweigh any possible security

reward. That was followed by a series of similar 'group of four' statements from eminent former officials in the UK and elsewhere. And then came the election of Barack Obama, a US president at last totally committed, intellectually and emotionally, to the ultimate achievement of a nuclear weapon free world, a vision which he articulated superbly in his 2009 Prague speech.

It's a message that has since been reinforced by, among other initiatives, the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) which I co-chaired, and which built upon the work of earlier commissions and panels, including the Blix Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction going back to the Canberra Commission in 1996. In our 2009 report we systematically analyzed and documented the nature and extent of the risk which exists from non-state terrorist actors getting their hands on nuclear weapons or material; of new states joining the ranks of the nuclear armed; of the proliferation risks that will be associated with any expansion of civil nuclear energy in the years ahead; and - above all - the risks associated with the existing global stockpile of 23,000 nuclear weapons, with their combined destructive capability of 150,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs, 7,000 of them still operationally deployed, and (unbelievably, 20 years after the end of the Cold War) some 2,000 of those held by the US and Russian still on dangerously high alert, ready to be launched on warning in the event of a perceived attack, within a decision window for each President of four to eight minutes.

The key point we made was that given what we now know about how many times the very sophisticated command and control systems of the Cold War years were strained by mistakes and false alarms, human error and human idiocy; given what we know about how much less sophisticated are the command and control systems of some of the newer nuclear-armed states; and given what we both know and can guess about how much more sophisticated and capable cyber offence will be of overcoming cyber defence in the years ahead, it is sheer dumb luck that we have survived as long as we have without catastrophe, and the worst kind of wishful thinking to assume that that luck can continue indefinitely.

The new momentum that has been generated by all this alarm-bell ringing, and associated articulation of action plans, has brought some results. Last year's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference did not collapse in disarray, like its predecessor, and some useful - albeit lowest common denominator - language was agreed, including on movement towards a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East. There has been movement in Vienna, at the IAEA, on setting up a fuel bank which will give an incentive to new nuclear energy entrants not to establish new uranium enrichment or plutonium reprocessing facilities of their own ('bomb starter kits' as they've rightly been called). France has dismantled its own such facilities, and set a ceiling of 300 on the number of warheads it will retain; the UK, similarly, has set a limit of 225 on its warhead numbers, and been transparent in declaring that no more than 160 of these will be operationally available.

In the US, President Obama has delivered, with the cooperation of President Medvedev, the US-Russia New START treaty, which will bring some significant reductions in deployed strategic weapons, if not their actual numbers; has hosted a successful global Summit (to be followed up next year in Seoul) on the crucial issue of securing nuclear weapons and material from misuse; and has overseen a Nuclear Posture Review, which - in the interests of reducing the role and salience of nuclear weapons - at least holds out the possibility that the US will declare that the 'sole purpose' of its nuclear armoury is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others

(though it's all rather like St Augustine's "God give me chastity and continence - but not yet.")

## THE BAD NEWS

But that's where the good news ends. The US Senate is no closer to ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty than it ever was, and China, India and Pakistan among others are sheltering behind that inaction; a host of obstacles stand in the way of further bilateral arms reduction negotiation any time soon - both in the US and Russia; although the Permanent Five Security Council members have started regular consultations on these issues, no progress at all has been made in terms of starting serious disarmament discussions with China, or on a wider multilateral basis; an ugly stalemate continues in Geneva on negotiation of the proposed treaty to ban further production of weapons grade fissile material; among proliferators and would-be proliferators, North Korea is no closer to being put back in the box, and Iran is closer than ever to jumping out of it should it make the decision to do so; and, even after last week's announcement - after months of haggling - that a Finnish diplomat would facilitate the process, one would need to be a supreme optimist to think in the present environment in the Middle East anything useful will emerge any time soon from the effort to hold a WMD Free Zone - and if that is so, quite apart from anything else, it won't help the chances of any kind of consensus on the next NPT Review Conference.

So the air has quite seriously gone out of the nuclear disarmament balloon. I've just come from a meeting in Seoul of North East Asia security specialists, and it was a dispiriting experience: they were all concerned with proliferation but not remotely focused on disarmament. The assumption was that nuclear weapons were a given and would remain so, this was seen as posing technical rather than existential problems, and the talk among US allies was all about maintaining traditional extended nuclear deterrence: it was like being in a Cold War time warp.

## RE-ENERGIZING THE AGENDA

So what can we do to reinflate that balloon - and ensure that it's not just full of hot air? How do we regenerate that momentum that seemed so promising just a couple of years ago? What should concerned parliamentarians and activists be arguing for?

**(1) REMAKING THE CASE FOR ZERO.** The first priority must be to make the case for global zero all over again, both top-down from leaders, and bottom-up from civil society activists, and this time in a way that the message really sticks in the mind of publics, and policymakers and those who most influence them. The story is there to be told, but it must be told over and over again, in a way that compels attention. The absolutely crucial messages can be very simply stated:

- nuclear weapons are the most indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever invented. They can't be uninvented, but they can and must be outlawed, as chemical and biological weapons have been;
- so long as anyone has nuclear weapons others will want them; so long as any nuclear weapons remain anywhere, they are bound one day to be used – if not by design, then by mistake or miscalculation;
- any such use will be catastrophic: nuclear weapons are the only ones capable of destroying life

on this planet as we know it. The only comparable risk to planetary survivability is climate change, and bombs can kill us a lot faster than C02.

**(2) MAPPING A CREDIBLE PATH TO ZERO.** A second priority, certainly intellectually (opinions will differ as to whether this is politically necessary) must be to map a credible path to zero - showing how it is possible to get to where we need to go. Nuclear disarmament activists and advocates are absolutely united in our commitment to that end goal, but there are differences - which we need to acknowledge and accommodate - in the way the road to zero has been mapped. The differences basically boil down to two different visions of what can be accomplished by when, which could be labelled the 'super-optimistic' and the 'optimistic' respectively:

**The Super-Optimistic Roadmap:** The Global Zero Action Plan. This proposes the phased, verified elimination of all nuclear weapons is a four-phased strategy to reach a global zero accord over the14 years from 2010 to 2023, and to complete the dismantlement of all remaining nuclear warheads over the following seven years to 2030. In Phase 1 (2010-13) there would be a major new bilateral accord between the US and Russia, and preparation for multilateral negotiations; in Phase 2 (2014-18) there would be further bilateral US-Russia agreed reductions, an agreed freeze on increases by the other nuclear-armed states, and establishment of a new verification and enforcement system; in Phase 3 (2019-23) the negotiation of a global zero accord, signed by all nuclear capable countries, for the phased, verified, proportional reduction of all nuclear arsenals to zero total warheads during Phase 4 (2024-30).

**The Optimistic Roadmap:** The ICNND Action Plan. My own Commission in its 2009 Report, while wholly committed to the zero objective, took the view that even on the most optimistic assumptions about what might be achievable in practice (and some of those assumptions are now looking decidedly shaky in the light of the loss of momentum I have described), it was simply not possible now to map the road all the way to zero, and that a more realistic course - and one that had a much better chance of getting buy-in from the relevant governments - was to aim at a 'minimization' target to be achieved over the fifteen years to 2025.

This would have three elements - a phased but dramatic reduction in stockpile numbers, from 23,000 to less than 2,000 (the US and Russia 500 each, and all the other armed states 1,000 between them); universal embrace of "no first use" doctrine; and practical credibility being given to that doctrine by having only a very small number of weapons actually deployed, with the rest needing a long lead-time to make operational.

As much as we would have liked to continue the timeline, to zero by 2030 or 2035 or some other specific date, we assessed that it was simply not credible to try to do so now. Getting from low numbers, to states giving up their weapons completely won't be, as much as we might hope otherwise, just a matter of continuing along a quantitative continuum, but jumping over four huge qualitative hurdles: geo-political uncertainty, psychological reluctance, and having in place verification and enforcement systems which every state is totally confident will stop any subsequent breakout. Maybe if the minimization phase goes well, we will be able to put a timeline on the elimination phase within the next decade, but we simply didn't think it was possible now.

Opinions here will no doubt differ as to which of these roadmaps you find the most credible – or least incredible! – and the most attractive for campaign purposes and energising real commitment by policymakers. Of course there is an argument, which I well understand, that specific dates have more immediate appeal, and that it is better to set one's sights too high rather than too low. The question we have to wrestle with is whether setting target dates which are seen by policymakers as impossibly ambitious will stop them listening altogether.

**(3) FINDING MECHANISMS TO ENERGIZE POLICYMAKERS AND PUBLICS.** Others will have ideas about how best to do this both in the short and long term – including no doubt through the education system, where nuclear issues seem to have been long more or less completely neglected in every country of which I'm aware - but let me mention three particular initiatives in which I've been involved one way or another.

**Nuclear Weapons Convention.** This is a way forward which has been mapped by a group of international NGOs, is supported by many governments (though so far none of the key nuclear players) and I am sure will have a good deal of support in the UK Parliament. It is to get started immediately on negotiating and seeking support for an all-embracing Nuclear Weapons Convention, which would provide for the phased achievement of global zero (though at the moment with the time-line left open to be negotiated) and embrace a complete legal array of supporting verification and enforcement machinery. The models that most proponents have in mind are the Ottawa treaty on land mines and Oslo treaty on cluster bombs, which were initially negotiated by groups of like-minded governments, have secured considerable (though still by no means universal) buy-in from other governments, and proved to be wonderful vehicles for energising grass roots campaigning.

There is not much to dislike about the idea of a NWC, though a number of governments clearly do - as I found when I tried to drum up support around Europe last year for a new global research centre which would have as one of its objectives the substantial further development of the draft now in circulation, so that it could be a credible foundation for multilateral disarmament negotiations whenever these could be started. I think work of this kind should now take place, and the only question that needs to be debated further is whether the NWC really is capable of being a "campaign treaty" on the Ottawa and Oslo models, or as I am inclined to think, the issues it addresses are so much more complex – with so many (like verification and enforcement) presently so unresolved – that this just couldn't work in the same way.

**State of Play Report Card.** I have been involved in establishing recently a new Centre at the Australian National University, supported by the Australian Government – which will work with SIPRI in Stockholm and have some outreach activities in Geneva with the assistance of the Swiss Government – whose primary role will be to produce a series of major 'state of play' report cards, the first at the end of 2012, summarizing where we have got to on the whole vast interlocking nuclear agenda that the world needs need to pursue, and making clear – without pulling punches in the way that official intergovernmental reports invariably do - who is pulling their weight and who is not, and what the action priorities need to be for the short, medium and longer term ahead. Hopefully this will prove to be a useful advocacy and energizing tool.

**Leadership Networks.** The third initiative is an important one which will be very familiar to this audience following the efforts of Lord Browne – and many of you here – to establish the European Leadership Network

on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament: the idea of gathering together experienced and high-profile current and former figures from politics, diplomacy and the services to inform and energize public opinion, and especially high-level policymakers to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and ultimately eliminated.

Inspired by the European example, and the excellent inputs that the ELN has been making, for example, into the ongoing debate on NATO's nuclear posture and specific issues like the future of tactical nuclear weapons, I have been engaged over the last year in establishing a similar group for the Asia Pacific region – with the help, as was the case with the ELN, of a seed grant from the Nuclear Threat Initiative, co-chaired by Sam Nunn and Ted Turner. APLN presently has some 30 very senior members from 13 countries from Japan to Pakistan – nearly all former Prime Ministers, Foreign or Defence Ministers, National Security Advisers or service chiefs – and we are meeting for the first time next month in Tokyo to see if we can thrash out a general position statement, and make progress on some specific issues where we have formed working groups, namely extended deterrence, transparency and the potential for multilateralising in the region the most sensitive stages of the nuclear fuel cycle.

If getting real movement on these issues is, in the Euro-Atlantic context, slow boring through very hard boards, let me tell you that in my part of the world it will be like tackling a rock with a penknife. But we will persist because we must.

## FINDING COMMON GROUND

One of the many frustrations of working with these issues is that, as with just about every reform effort in human history, there is a tendency for activists to become more absorbed in the thrill of chasing down apostates and dissidents in the ranks on particular policy arguments than focusing on the goals that unite them.

But even if we can't all agree on the utility of setting a particular target date for achieving zero, we can surely agree on the initial series of steps we need to take to start that journey, and in fact to get a very long way down the road compared to where we are today. And if we can't all agree about how at this stage to best use a draft NWC, we can surely agree that putting intellectual and political energy into creating a really compelling legal framework document of the kind that can serve as the basis for serious intergovernmental negotiations is a hugely useful enterprise.

The crucial task is to get nuclear disarmament back to the centre of the global policy agenda, and to keep that agenda moving forward. This is not, after all, just another difficult policy issue. Nothing less than the fate of this planet of ours hangs on us getting this right. It's not a matter of our children and grandchildren not forgiving us if we get it wrong. It's a matter of whether they'll be around at all.

House of Commons
18th October 2011

# 'NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL: CAN WE REALLY 'COUNT DOWN TO ZERO'?'

**THE RT HON LORD BROWNE OF LADYTON and THE RT HON SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND QC MP**

Transcript of a Global Strategy Forum debate chaired by Lord Lothian

***The Rt Hon Lord Browne of Ladyton*** *was the Labour MP for Kilmarnock and Loudoun from 1997-2010. He was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office 2001-03; Minister of State: Department for Work and Pensions (Work) 2003-04, Home Office (Citizenship, Immigration and Nationality) 2004-05; and Chief Secretary to the Treasury (2005-06). He was Secretary of State for Defence from 2006-2008 under both Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and Secretary of State for Scotland from 2007-2008. He was a member of Joint Committee on Human Rights from 2001-2009 and the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy in 2010. In 2009, he was appointed the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Sri Lanka 2009. He stood down as an MP in the 2010 General Election and was raised to the Peerage as Baron Browne of Ladyton, of Ladyton in Ayrshire and Arran in the Dissolutions Honours. He is the Convener of the Top Level Group of UK Parliamentarians for Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, a position which he has held since September 2010 and since he stepped down as an MP, he has focused on multilateral disarmament and conflict resolution issues.*

***The Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind QC MP*** *was elected as MP for Pentlands in 1974 and represented that constituency until 1997. In 1979, when the Conservatives were returned to power under Margaret Thatcher. Sir Malcolm was appointed a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, at first in the Scottish Office and he was then transferred to the FCO, being promoted to Minister of State in 1983. He became a member of the Cabinet in 1986 as Secretary of State for Scotland. In 1990 he became Secretary of State for Transport and in 1992, Secretary of State for Defence. From 1995-97 he was Foreign Secretary. He was one of only four ministers to serve throughout the whole Prime Ministerships of both Margaret Thatcher and John Major. In 1997 he was knighted in recognition of his public service. Sir Malcolm was re-elected as a MP in May 2005 for Kensington and Chelsea. He was elected as MP for Kensington in May 2010. He served as the Shadow Secretary of State for Work & Pensions and Welfare Reform until December 2005 when he chose to return to the backbenches. He was Chairman of the Standards & Privileges Committee 2009-2010; and he is Chairman, Intelligence and Security Committee (2010-); and UK representative on the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (2010-).*

***Lord Lothian:*** We have got two speakers today who share certain past offices in common. Both were Secretaries of State for Scotland and both were Secretaries of State for Defence. The difference being that in

case of Malcolm Rifkind he did both consecutively, in the case of Des Browne, with a great deal of skill, he did both at the same time! But the reason we have asked them here today is because they have got very strong views on the issue of nuclear disarmament in general, in the future, and how we get there, and I thought it was very appropriate at this particular time to look at what progress has been made since the idea of trying to bring nations together to achieve nuclear disarmament was first mooted and to hear whether there are differences of opinion between them.

I am going to call first of all on Des Browne and then on Malcolm Rifkind. As I say, Des Browne was Secretary of State for Defence, Secretary of State for Scotland, but he has also been the Convener of the Top Level Group of UK Parliamentarians for multilateral nuclear disarmament and non proliferation, and since stepping down as an MP, he has focused on multilateral disarmament and conflict resolution. Malcolm Rifkind, along with those offices I have described, was also Foreign Secretary in the two years before the John Major government fell at the general election in 1997, and so we have two highly experienced speakers to speak to us today and I am going to ask Des Browne if he will begin.

***Lord Browne of Ladyton:*** Thank you very much indeed, Michael, for the invitation and for your introduction.

You identified some of the things that Malcolm and I have in common and indeed you do too, because you are a member of the Top Level Group of UK Parliamentarians For Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament, Non Proliferation and Nuclear Security. But we are all also in common, members of the faculty of Advocates in Scotland. I say this for a reason, because another prominent member of the Top Level group For Multilateral Disarmament and Non Proliferation, Menzies Campbell, is also a member of the Faculty of Advocates there.

Why, of the four of us, since I am the Junior Counsel and all three of them are QCs, am I the convener of this organisation and they just members? Well, it is an operation of a principle that applies in the police as follows. If there was a superintendent, a sergeant and an inspector and a private in the car, the private would be given the responsibility of driving the car so that if it crashes, it is his career on the line and not theirs.

I am delighted to share this platform with you and Malcolm and I am constrained to address this question for 10-15 minutes only. Inevitably, in such a complex subject, it will not be a comprehensive 10 or 15 minutes across the significant waterfront that the question raises. And I have no doubt, that somebody, when it is open to the floor, will say 'you didn't mention something' so, excuse me in advance if I did not mention something, but it is all there and we will get to it.

We are constrained by this question to look forward, but I think that in order to look forward, we need to spend a couple of minutes looking at the today's context, which is a product of the last three years or thereabouts of quite significant progressive change, in my view, in the international environment.

But before I do that, can I say to you that my answer to this question, 'Nuclear Non Proliferation and Arms Control: Can We Really 'Count Down To Zero'?' is an unequivocal 'yes', but that it requires continued political

leadership and at the moment, we are going through a period when that political leadership is in question and needs to regroup.

But in the past three years, we have seen some progressive changes in the political context, for those of us who aspire to a world free of nuclear weapons. I give you some examples of that change: obviously President Obama's speech in April 2009 was a watershed moment. To have a President of the United States articulate that ambition in his foreign policy was a significant achievement. I have to say - I pause here for just a moment - that I am extremely disappointed by the failure of the international community and its leadership to fall in behind him and to sustain support for him. We cheered that man to the echo in Wenceslas Square in Prague, and then essentially told him to get on with it, while we all went back to as near the status quo as our domestic environments and other environments would make us comfortable with. We have let him down. His own domestic politics I will come to in a moment or two, but we have let him down and it is time that we made amends.

The second significant event was, of course, the UN Security Council Resolution 1887, where the whole world fell in, nominally at least, behind that agenda in September 2009. Then there was the Washington Nuclear Summit convened by President Obama in April 2010 which set the wider context of security, and then more recently, for the first time in a decade, the United States and Russia resumed strategic arms control negotiations with the signing of the New START Treaty in Prague on the anniversary of the original Prague speech in April 2010. And that has become bogged down, unfortunately, in US domestic politics and I will not say, until it is absolutely certain, that the New START Treaty will not be ratified by the Senate, in the lame duck session or later, but it is not looking good. And it is not looking good for issues which have nothing to do with the Treaty, issues which have nothing to do with America's security, nothing to do with their international relations, but have everything to do with the current domestic state of US politics and the disinclination among leading members of the Republican Party to allow President Obama to have any successes.

Now it was gratifying to me that the Afghan debate, the NATO summit, was interrupted by six leaders across Europe, who, in an intervention, said 'we cannot allow New START to be stopped at this stage for our security'. That was a very strong message, but unfortunately, as with most of what we have done from this perspective to support this agenda in the United States, it was too little, much too late. But at least it was gratifying that people could and did articulate that. The question is, of course, why it was only six of the leaders who were articulating this message very strongly at the NATO summit and not others.

I have not forgotten what we refer to in this business as a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference in New York in 2010. We celebrated that success rightly, but only on a comparative basis. We should not underestimate just how difficult it was to hold the confidence and the credibility of our position as a P5 nation with the others, and those discussions with non-nuclear weapon states and the degree to which they will test our commitment for the future, against the catalogue of actions that we agreed to in order to get that success and one of them in particular, the Conference for the Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone for the Middle East will be a significant challenge for the P5, not to mention to mention the other states who are parties.

So my argument is that we can build on this (I will not rehearse what we have done here in the United Kingdom in the previous government and indeed in the present government reflected in the Strategic Defence and Security Review which was quite a significant disarmament announcement) and indeed, there is continuity and a coherence of policy between our government and the coalition government in this area, but as well as those successes, there are a series of failures and challenges that we have to own up to.

The most recent of those failures was the revised Strategic Concept of NATO, which in my view was a missed opportunity to address the issue of reducing the salience and the numbers of nuclear weapons against the agenda which that Concept buys into, of the ambition of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We now have a position that is difficult to explain - indeed the US is now in this position - about when we will, if ever, use our nuclear weapons. As a consequence of the Nuclear Posture Review in the United States, the Americans revised their declaratory policy and they gave a message to the rest of the world that they would not use or threaten to use these weapons against states that were in compliance with their NPT obligations. It is known as a negative assurance in the business. It was a substantial and comprehensive negative assurance and it was a very welcome statement by the United States Administration and by the President, and we, at the end of this Strategic Defence and Security Review, followed that lead, and in our reviewed document, we used almost identical words in issuing that assurance.

Now since those two weapon systems are assigned to NATO, you would have thought that when NATO went into summit and it was considering its Strategic Concept and in particular its declaratory policy in relation to nuclear weapons, that it would be axiomatic that it would come out with the similar statement, but it did not. So we are now in a position whereby NATO has a less progressive position to the rest of the world about the use of its nuclear weapons than two of its component elements who have assigned their weapons to the NATO Defence Capability.

Now I know the answer as to why that is the case - the answer lies, of course, in the fact that France also assigns its weapons and was not prepared to accept the declaratory policy which included those words. But it leaves us in a position, not just of ambivalence but of contradiction and it has reversed within weeks a progressive step that we took towards a world free of nuclear weapons and a significant arms control statement.

A second disappointment is that NATO failed to address properly the issue of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, US nuclear weapons in Europe. These are a unique capability in my experience, because there is not a military mind in the world that thinks that they have any military efficacy.

Now I suspect that in fact, Russian military minds understand that too. So, as a deterrent in my view, they fail one of the significant tests, of being a credible weapons system. Their removal back to the United States which I believe overwhelmingly the United States administration in all its elements want, would have been a significant arms control step. There was an opportunity and there was genuine leadership shown by a number of NATO countries on this issue, notably Germany (leadership, interestingly enough, in the countries where these weapons are stationed), but that opportunity was scorned by the Alliance. Now, there may be

an opportunity and a continuing review which is signposted in the labyrinthine documents which come out of these summits, to readdress both of these issues, but we failed to show the political leadership that was necessary to try to achieve what we have all bought into.

I am going to stop there because I have run out of time, not because I have run out of issues to talk about, and hopefully they will come up in the broader discussion that we have and I will leave Malcolm to address the rather less complex issues of both Korea and Iran!

***Sir Malcolm Rifkind:*** Thank you very much indeed. Des, in his opening comments, addressed the question that we have been asked to look at, whether we can really 'count down to zero' and said he could give us an unequivocal answer that we could. That is one point of difference between us. I agree with him, but in my case it is equivocal, not unequivocal, and I do not hesitate to say that.

But let me start by making what I think is a point worth pondering over. The argument for nuclear disarmament has been going on for 60 years and there have been many people campaigning for them for 60-70 years. What has changed in the last five years, however, is something that should not go by unnoticed. It is that there is a whole new group of people who have spent most of their career sometimes responsible for nuclear weapons and for explaining their necessity, who have not changed their minds, but who have said that the emphasis now has moved on. When you get Henry Kissinger, George Schultz and Sam Nunn in the United States, calling for a major effort towards nuclear disarmament, when in this country, Douglas Hurd, myself, Des Browne, who have had these responsibilities; in Germany, Helmut Schmidt and many similar people throughout the western world, none of whom have been accused of pinkish tendencies in the past, nevertheless arguing that this is a priority, one has to ask why. And there is a reason why, and the most important reason is this: during that whole period of the Cold War, the overriding objective was to prevent Europe being the location of a Third World War, and that Third World War, whether it was nuclear or conventional, would have resulted in hundreds of millions of deaths, and we know that from the First and Second World Wars, which were, until the very end, both conventional conflicts.

We still have nuclear threats today. But even if those nuclear threats materialised in a conflict between North Korea and South Korea at a nuclear level, or between India and Pakistan, or between Iran and its neighbours, they would be horrible, they would involve very many casualties, but they would not be causing a world war in themselves or very unlikely to do so. Now this is relevant because there is always risk involved, massive risk involved, in the possession of nuclear weapons, but as in so many other aspects of human life, the level of risk you are prepared to accept depends on the level of threat that you are trying to prevent, and a global confrontation that could have destroyed the planet obviously justifies a higher risk to prevent it, than do regional conflicts, however terrible these might have been. That is the first point of distinction.

But there are two others as well which are worth thinking about which explains why the world has moved on. This is no longer a debate as it was during the Cold War about unilateral disarmament, about better red than dead, as the phrase was at that time. Every person that I have mentioned so far remains a deep and unqualified believer, not in unilateral, but in multilateral disarmament. Unless it can be achieved at the

multilateral level, it will not happen and it should not happen, for all the reasons that were valid in the past. That is the second consideration, that is the second change that has taken place in the political debate.

And the third is this: even if you believe that nuclear weapons are necessary, or may continue to be necessary for many years to come, that does not remotely justify the sheer quantity of nuclear warheads that are available in the world at this moment in time.

That is not to say there has not been, not just progress, but massive progress. At the height of the Cold War, there was something like 63,000 nuclear warheads in the world. Because of tremendous achievements in the early 1990s, that figure today is not 63,000, it is about 21,000 to 22,000 - a massive reduction, but still infinitely more than is needed for any necessary purpose involving deterrence, even in a nuclear world.

And therefore that comes to the heart of this question about whether global zero is achievable. My honest view is: I don't know. I would like to think it is. I am happy to try and work towards that happening, because I think on balance, and I say on balance, it would be well worth achieving, if it could be delivered, because of the benefits that it would produce.

But - and this is the crucial point - even if you are sceptical about whether zero can be achieved or even ought to be aimed for and even if we try very hard and do not achieve it, it doe not actually matter, as long as we have in the process dramatically reduced the number of nuclear weapons that are around. If we can get, let us say for illustration, from 23,000 nuclear warheads down to 10,000 or 5,000, that will be a lot easier than getting to zero, much easier. It might sound odd that I say that, but think about it for a moment. If you have 500 nuclear warheads and your enemy has 500 and you both promise to come down to 200 and you keep your promise but he stays at 250, okay, that is wrong, that is bad, that is dangerous, but it does not fundamentally alter the balance of power. But if you have come down each to two or three nuclear warheads and you go from two to one and from one to zero, and you do go to zero, but your enemy keeps one, that fundamentally changes the balance of power. In the kingdom of the blind, the one eyed man is king, and therefore getting to zero will always be infinitely more difficult than getting major reductions in the numbers of nuclear warheads, difficult enough though that is.

Now much of this depends not on all the nuclear powers, it depends on the United States and Russia, because between the two of them they have 95% of all the current nuclear warheads. And like Des, I strongly agree as to the benefits of the START Treaty that was negotiated between the Russians and the Americans and it would indeed be appalling if that Treaty were rejected by the Senate, not for reasons relevant to the Treaty, but because of some mistaken belief as to the benefits that would flow in terms of domestic US political interest.

The NATO summit was also a disappointment, partly for the reasons that Des mentioned, but I think in order to see a major reduction of nuclear weapons which might or might not one day lead to zero, there needs to be momentum. Having got that START Treaty, even if it is ratified, it is only a small step in the desired direction and what then is the next step? And the obvious choice in my judgement is very similar in a sense to what Des

was saying, are tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Now the NATO summit did not say anything on that, but in any event what it requires is not a unilateral decision by NATO that the 200 American nuclear tactical warheads that are kept in Europe should be withdrawn. What is necessary is for this to be the next stage of a NATO-Russian dialogue, in order to have multilateral disarmament of this class of weapon, because not only do the Americans have tactical nuclear weapons, the Russians actually have very many more. Most of them they have for reasons that are unconnected with Western Europe. The reality is their main interest is the potential threat one day from China and the need to be in a position to resist such a threat if it materialises on their eastern border.

But they do also have tactical nuclear weapons next to the borders of NATO and of the European Union: in Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave next to Poland and in the Kola peninsula next to Scandinavia. And therefore what there should be is a negotiation, so that Europe itself becomes freed of tactical nuclear weapons which are, as has been said, militarily useless.

Let me in the time available just make one additional comment, because I have not obviously mentioned Trident, the British nuclear weapon, the French nuclear weapon, and the contribution of other countries in this debate.

At the end of the day, if we are to move towards zero for the reasons I have mentioned already, it has to be overwhelmingly an American and a Russian initiative, but we cannot expect, nor should we expect, the Americans and the Russians, if they are able to make major progress, to continue in that route unless there is also similar movement at some stage from the other nuclear weapon states. China is the most important. If Russia and America came dramatically down in their numbers, at some stage, the strategic relationship and the strategic balance of power between Russia and China or America and China would begin to alter in China's favour and therefore China, and accordingly India, are relevant in this matter.

As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, we are pretty close, maybe not absolutely at, but we are pretty close to the minimum that we can have, without actually abandoning a nuclear weapons capability in the first place. Over the last 20 years we have got rid of freefall nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom, we have got rid of tactical nuclear weapons, we have dramatically reduced the number of warheads that are carried by our Trident submarines, and in a whole range of other issues, we have made very substantial changes and progress in that direction. There may be something at the margins that could still be done.

Why, therefore you may say, why don't we, if you are that interested in nuclear disarmament, multilateral disarmament, why not just get rid of Trident? How can you possibly be renewing the Trident submarines or contemplating that at such a moment in time? The answer is a very simple and obvious one. We believe in multilateral disarmament, not unilateral.

The arguments are as powerful today as they ever were and I say that because, when you are dealing with nuclear weapons, the fact that the Cold War is behind us is an enormous achievement, it makes us all feel

much safer and rightly so. But we do not know what is going to happen in a timescale of the next 30 or 40 years. I use this simply as an illustration: who is going to govern Russia in 30 years' time? Russia, sadly is not a democracy, it is an authoritarian state. It will not go back to communism, but it is not inconceivable that one day it could have some xenophobic nationalists who had access to nuclear weapons and might have aggressive tendencies. It is not a prediction I am making, I do not expect it to happen, I do not think it will happen, but I cannot say if I am absolutely 100% certain it could not happen or will not happen and therefore, if you have this ultimate ability to ensure your security already in existence, to simply dismantle it unilaterally would be the height of irresponsibility.

And who can assume that in 30 or 40 years the United States is necessarily going to be willing to continue with the nuclear guarantee that it gives to Europe? It could easily at some stage - again I make no prediction, I don't think it is going to happen, but I cannot say that it could not happen - that a future American administration would say, 'come on now Europe, you are perfectly capable of defending yourselves, you don't need America anymore, you already have France and Britain with nuclear weapons capability, why should the United States which has preoccupations elsewhere, give such an unqualified commitment?'

So these are difficult issues, they are complex issues, but I conclude by simply saying that they should not remove from us the reality that we have a massive obligation to move in the direction of global zero, partly for the reasons I have mentioned, partly to make it more difficult for proliferation to take place, for North Korea and Iran to argue 'they have it, therefore we must have it', and all that type of argument, we all know these are the kinds of issues that are raised.

But I end by reiterating my earlier comments: do not get too neurotic about whether it is zero that we ultimately reach - we have not got a clue whether we can ever get there or not - but going in that direction in a fundamental way, will at the very least dramatically reduce the number of these nuclear weapons in the world. It will also reduce the amount of fissile material in the world, it will make it that much more difficult for some of it to end up in terrorist hands where it could be used against us, not by a state, but by a terrorist organisation, and therefore the strategy of encouraging multilateral disarmament is as valid whether or not you believe that zero can be actually achieved, or can only be approached.

***Lord Lothian:*** I just want to pose one question to both our speakers because as they know, three years ago, I voted against the renewal of Trident in 15 years' time, on the basis of whether it would be a relevant deterrent in 15 years' time and whether it was an efficient deterrent, and largely because I questioned the credibility of such a weapon when that time came. When we talk about unilateral disarmament we tend to think about doing it now. In terms of our Trident we are really talking about doing something in 15 years' time, and I wondered whether you would like to comment on that.

***Lord Browne of Ladyton:*** I had responsibility for the Ministry of Defence as its Secretary of State at the time of this debate that we engaged in, and we were on different sides of the debate at that time. Michael, as you will remember, and as I have reminded our audience, I took great care in the 2006 White Paper to set out the reasons why I thought it was necessary to make the decision to begin the process of planning and design to

replace the boats on which the Trident weapons system was deployed. They were, generally, the reasons that Sir Malcolm has articulated, that there was an uncertainty about the direction of travel of the world and the strategic environment in which the generations who would in 15 or 20 years' time have to face these same challenges was difficult to describe in a progressive sense.

I carefully and still carefully avoid giving Russia as an example of where I think that uncertainty lies, but, and I do not reverse from that position. What I do now say however, is that that geopolitical environment has changed. It has not changed enough for me to be absolutely certain that planning to renew our Trident system is a safe bet. But it has changed significantly and it has changed significantly substantially because of the leadership of President Obama and the reaction of the world to that leadership. Now if that hope, if that expectation is to be reversed and we should of course remind ourselves that the agenda that President Obama set for himself in April 2009 has already been pared back quite significantly. In terms of ratification for example, he was predicting the ratification of CTBT, not that the lame duck ratification of the New START Treaty was to be a taster for CTBT ratification in his time line.

Now, if this agenda of multilateral disarmament, improved non proliferation, increased nuclear security, can be driven forward, then we could create an environment in which a future generation could say, 'you know, we can envisage a security that doesn't require us to hold on to these weapons', but that would have to be done, in my view, in a multilateral environment.

That having been said however, in 2006 which is only four years ago, on the best advice available, I recommended and drove forward the argument for a series of decisions - I will not rehearse them all, they are in the White Paper. They are also in the Strategic Defence Review document four years later, presumably instructed by the same sources of advice. They are different decisions.

Four years later, the same sources of advice have advised the Coalition government and they have accepted this advice, that we could safely reduce the size of our deployed nuclear deterrent by 25%, that consequently we could reduce by about 25% the stockpile of deployed and non-deployed weapons. They have taken advice consequently from the number of warheads that are necessary, about the number of missiles that need to be deployed on each boat and, quite significantly, they have clearly got different advice about how long the current vanguard boats can operate safely to provide continuous at sea deterrence than I was given, because it was that advice that instructed the arguments that I made in public.

Now, there are two consequences of that. Either you were prescient, in terms of your time lines and you knew much more technically and by the way, they have also made another decision, that the decision about a new warhead does not need to be made in this Parliament, in other words that our current generation of warheads can safely be maintained much longer into the future than we expected which is, incidentally, exactly what President Obama, on the advice of the JASON Scientists, concluded in his Nuclear Posture Review, but these are different warheads. Now there are two possible consequences from that – I am sorry to take so much time about this, but this is an important issue.

One: the technical advice has significantly changed because of a greater understanding in four years than we have had from four decades of having these weapons. Or, alternatively, the imperative of the economic situation and the political leadership of a Coalition which has a partner in it that does not think we should have like-for-like renewal, impressed upon those giving advice that they should refine their advice. Now if it is the latter and that is at least a possibility, if it is the latter, then this whole area in terms of our Strategic Defence, needs a thorough re-examination.

***Sir Malcolm Rifkind:*** Well, quite briefly if I may, I do not think the situation is quite as potentially sinister in terms of the advice that governments are receiving and the fact that it is maybe different to the advice that Des received when he was Secretary of State. One has to remember that the advice you are being given as to how long the existing submarines may be able to function effectively, how long the warheads may be maintained without unacceptable consequences and matters of that kind - first of all, they are matters of judgment, not matters of statistical fact and there is always a range of possibilities and the advice that civil servants and the Chiefs of Staff give will depend on how much risk they are prepared and government is prepared to accept.

The number of times I was told, and I am sure you were too, Des: 'well, if you want to be absolutely safe about something do X, but if that's not your total priority, we can probably make do with Y'; and there may be a significant difference between the two, but there should be an irreducible minimum and the irreducible minimum that has emerged, at least I presume it is irreducible, is that it still remains the fact that if you want to replace Trident, the submarines, the new submarines, have to be available sometime in the mid 2020s and that means that a decision on confirming construction of these submarines has to be made not later than six or seven years from now. There may be variations at the edges of that, but it is not such a dramatic difference as might otherwise be implied.

National Liberal Club

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# PUTTING THE AMERICAN NONPROLIFERATION DEBATE IN PERSPECTIVE

**by ELBRIDGE COLBY**

***Elbridge Colby*** *is a defense analyst in Washington, D.C. He previously has served in a number of U.S. Government positions, including with the New START negotiating and ratification team in the Department of Defense and on the Congressional Strategic Posture and Presidential Weapons of Mass Destruction Commissions. The views here are his own.*

In an era of intense polarization in the American political scene, there is at least one area of consensus. That is that the further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and particularly nuclear weapons, is not only an unalloyed menace but also that its prevention must be one of – if not the – central organizing principles of U.S. security policy. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama may have pursued markedly different approaches on Guantanamo Bay and interrogation, Israeli-Palestinian peace, and dealing with Russia, but they both fervently agree that the spread of nuclear weapons capabilities to additional states and terrorist groups is the preeminent danger to American national security. Today's leading hawk voices in Congress and on the campaign trail may lambaste the Obama Administration, but they rarely differ with its assertion that proliferation is the cardinal menace and that extreme steps should be taken to prevent it.

This consensus is actually a newfangled thing. Liberals, who have always tended to see a solution to the problem of war in the control of weapons and to see nuclear weapons as the ultimate manifestation of the mad villainy of allowing man's ingenuity to be put towards implements of death and destruction, have always naturally been drawn to the cause of nonproliferation. But for conservatives it was not always so. Indeed, in the early days of the Cold War, American conservatives held a much more relaxed attitude towards nuclear proliferation. President Dwight Eisenhower actively encouraged the acquisition of nuclear arms by European NATO allies as part of his long-term effort to substitute autonomous European military might for the heavy American commitment to Europe's defense. President Richard Nixon and his advisor Henry Kissinger initially scoffed at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty they had inherited from the Johnson Administration, only reluctantly coming to support its ratification and refusing to pressure other countries to sign on. For much of the Cold War, concerns about proliferation were mostly the bailiwick of liberals, while conservatives regarded the issue as a lower priority at best and a distraction from the main Soviet threat at worst.

Conservatives began to take more cognizance of the proliferation problem in the latter stages of the Cold War as the difficulties of controlling nuclear escalation became more apparent and the U.S. military began focusing on trying to fight without resorting to nuclear arms. But it was the collapse of the Soviet Union that catapulted what still remained a secondary concern to a top priority for at least hawkish conservatives. This

was because the dissolution of the overriding strategic peril for the West and the chief constraint to U.S. global preeminence opened up the vista of American hegemony unbounded by fear of opponents' military power, a vision that naturally enthralled hawks. Nonproliferation, by preventing potential American adversaries from acquiring or retaining nuclear weapons, could help ensure the military supremacy that would enable American pretensions to global leadership. Preventing the "rogue states" of the world from acquiring nuclear weapons would mean that American conventional military forces could, if need be, exploit their tremendous superiority, giving Washington enormous leverage. Thus for the past two decades, American hawks have seen nonproliferation (and its more assertive cousin, counterproliferation) as a crucial cause in the service of the benevolent stability they see as stemming from American military supremacy. The extreme logic of this policy was well expressed by John Bolton, who frankly remarked that he advocated pursuing a world in which only the United States possesses nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, more traditional conservative realists, who regarded proliferation as a serious problem but one that could be managed by adroit strategy and diplomacy, were sidelined.

The result of all this: American hawks have joined liberals in placing nuclear nonproliferation at the very center of Washington's security agenda. Agreeing over ends, American hawks and liberals battled not over whether or how much to strive to stem proliferation, but rather how to do so. Liberals urged mannerly international cooperation, negotiations with recalcitrant regimes, and demonstrations of U.S. good behavior, not least through dramatic reductions in Washington's own nuclear arsenal. The classic liberal principles that undergirded these recommendations were that secure peace was possible through the expression of good intentions and that non-nuclear weapons states' calculus' about whether to pursue nuclear arms would be heavily influenced by perceptions of how Washington handled its own nuclear forces. Conservative hawks, on the other hand, doubted that international cooperation could accomplish much or was even particularly relevant in the face of a determined leadership dismissive if not outright hostile to the dictates of the so-called international community. Rather, they placed their hopes on the unfettered assertion of American and, to some extent, allied power, which would prevent proliferation either anticipatorily through its threatened use or, if need be, retroactively through its actual employment, as in Iraq.

But even this divide between liberals and hawks was not unbridgeable. Those most concerned about proliferation and least impressed with the utility of American nuclear deterrence found common ground in the nuclear abolition movement. Liberals enthralled with the idea of a world without nuclear weapons were willing to countenance the use of conventional military force to prevent proliferation; hawks ready to use American conventional military might to preserve Washington's primacy were willing to dispense with nuclear weapons for which they saw little value if it would contribute to removing them entirely from the strategic landscape, thus, in their view, tilting the playing field decisively in favor of the United States and its allies.

Given this broad agreement, discussion in Washington about the proliferation of nuclear weapons have been and continue to be almost entirely about the means of preventing it. Will sanctions be effective enough in stopping Iran's pursuit of a capability to build nuclear weapons, or is military action necessary? Would further negotiations with North Korea retard its nuclear weapons development or simply validate Pyongyang's mischievous diplomacy? Should Washington stand on principle with respect to the nuclear energy trade or

try to make the best of an imperfect situation?

Needless to say, these debates are tremendously important – for proliferation is dangerous. Proliferation to rogue states empowers otherwise weaker dangerous regimes, giving profoundly objectionable regimes at least the option of resorting to the use of weapons of massive devastation and complicating U.S. and allied military strategy. Smaller and weaker nuclear states are also less likely to posture and operate their forces in a stabile fashion, given the significant demands of ensuring effective command and control, survivability, and the like. This means that there could well be more itchy fingers on nuclear triggers. Moreover, more states with nuclear weapons probably means a greater chance that such weapons or the fissile material of which they are comprised are lost or transferred to a terrorist group.

But these debates are nonetheless incomplete, for the single-minded focus in talking about the means of stemming proliferation has crowded out, if not actively excluded, much serious discussion in American policy circles about the broader strategic context in which nonproliferation efforts must sensibly be situated. That is, with all the talk about how, the questions of how much; what next; and whether it is worthwhile have been considered far less than they should have been.

This single-minded focus is problematic for several reasons. The first is that the perils of proliferation, while very real, have been exaggerated beyond what they warrant, with baleful consequences for the cost-benefit decisions that must be at the heart of sensible policy. Proliferation's perils are usually exaggerated in three ways. One is that acquisition of a nuclear weapon by even a much inferior power will essentially emasculate U.S. extended deterrent commitments. Assuming Washington does not lose its nerve, this is almost certainly false, and is demonstrably so in the case of North Korea, where the United States continues resolutely to defend its South Korean and Japanese allies. The same would very likely be true in the case of Iran, which is much weaker than the United States and the many countries arrayed in its corner. The second exaggeration is that one or two instances of proliferation will inevitably lead to a "cascade" of follow-on proliferation. This too is almost certainly false, and again is demonstrably so in the cases of South Korea and Japan, neither of which is materially closer to pursuing a nuclear weapon than it was before Pyongyang crossed the threshold. Again, the main variable is the behavior of the United States. Certainly cascades could well occur if the United States responded to North Korean or Iranian acquisition by turning tail, but, if Washington holds the line against its newly nuclear-armed adversaries and makes clear that it continues to regard proliferators in the gravest disfavor, its allies and partners in Northeast Asia and the Middle East are unlikely to trade the security of the finest military protection in the world for the difficulties and uncertainties of an autonomous nuclear program.

The final exaggeration is the likelihood of terrorist nuclear use. This is a genuinely grave danger, but rhetoric has far outstripped reality. It is very difficult for terrorists to obtain a nuclear weapon and dramatically so for them to manufacture one. States, meanwhile, have essentially no incentive to transfer a nuclear weapon to a terrorist group (except as a means of delivery) and extremely powerful disincentives, as Washington and others have made it translucently clear that they would regard employment of transferred weapons as the responsibility of the transferring state (though such deterrent threats could be made more clear).

Yet these cautionary points are drowned out in Washington policy discussions, with the consequence that the widespread agreement on the supposedly nearly apocalyptic dangers of proliferation often leads to agreement to policies that are not worth the benefits pursued – on the liberal side, nuclear abolition; on the hawk side, the invasion of Iraq.

The second danger of such an exclusive focus on means to the exclusion of context is that it prevents solid planning and preparation for dealing with proliferation should it occur. If dealing with nuclear opponents were easy, this would not be a problem, but it is obviously not. In the face of a capably nuclear North Korea or Iran, Washington's allies would need to be assured, U.S. and allied forces would need to be appropriately postured and operated, plans would need to be updated, and so forth. This takes hard thinking, organizational effort, and time to do right. Preventing "thinking about the unthinkable" is a recipe for being ill-prepared and could well worsen the problem. A recent example of this affliction was the introduction of a piece of legislation by several prominent hawk senators that would make it U.S. policy to exclude from consideration even the possibility of planning to contain a nuclear-armed Iran. Not only does such refusal to plan guarantee a lack of preparation if nonproliferation efforts fail, it abandons one of the most effective tools of nonproliferation, which is the credible demonstration that the United States and its allies will not be bullied or coerced by a nation that acquires a nuclear weapon – especially a far weaker one like North Korea or Iran. If Pyongyang and Tehran see that gaining a nuclear arsenal will earn them nothing in terms of strategic advantage against Washington and its many allies and partners while guaranteeing their enduring distrust and steadfast resistance so long as they persist in their noxious behavior, they are at least somewhat less likely to cross the line in the first place or to reconsider after having crossed it.

There is a mixture of good and bad news in this picture. On the one hand, the dangers posed by proliferation, while very significant, have been overblown. The world is not at the precipice of destruction, as we have all too frequently heard from this peculiar quasi-alliance of liberals and hawks. Even if further proliferation occurs, we are very likely to be able to weather it, if we keep our heads and our wits about us. The bad news, however, is that the problem is not going away and that our continued mis-assessment as to its dangers and how to deal with it stand a solid chance of doing real harm. At this point, nuclear weapons technology is nearing three-quarters of a century in age, nuclear energy is undergoing something of a renaissance, and many countries still see nuclear weapons as essential to their security and prestige. Trying to roll back the proliferation of nuclear weapons is a bit like King Canute ordering the tides to recede, as none of these factors seems likely to change radically in the foreseeable future.

It is important not to overstate the point, though. Nonproliferation is very important - but it must be conceived of in more realistic terms. That is to see it as a way of controlling and regulating rather than eliminating the problem of the existence of nuclear weapons. Over the long term nonproliferation should be viewed as a way to shape the strategic landscape in stabilizing directions, an instrumental method of achieving a satisfactory strategic equilibrium rather than as a puritanical crusade. Seen in this light, proliferation of nuclear weapons is to be opposed and striven against, but also is endurable and manageable if counteracted wisely and strongly. In this light, extreme, particularly risky, or otherwise misbegotten policy proposals forwarded in the name of stopping or preventing proliferation would receive a great deal more of the skepticism they rightly deserve than

today. Unrealistic and unwise proposals like getting rid of our own nuclear arsenal, for instance, would hardly receive much of a hearing if they were not able to tether themselves to the idea of rolling back proliferation. Barring exceptionally good fortune in the stemming of further proliferation, Washington is likely to come to this more modest view of nonproliferation's promise and purposes sooner or later. On the one hand, the Sisyphean task of pushing back against every instance of proliferation will face the inevitability that new countries will find ways to obtain nuclear weapons if they are sufficiently resolute and desirous. On the other hand, this outcome is near certain to prove less calamitous than many have warned. One danger – a serious one, were it likely – is that Washington might become too despondent in the face of proliferation's inevitability and so would be too sanguine about allowing it to go unchallenged or unshaped. Needless to say, this would be a grave mistake, as the West should seek to prevent proliferation where it can do so at reasonable cost, and to regulate and channel it appropriately where it must accept it. The other danger, however, is that, facing the precipice of further, even incremental, proliferation, Washington might lash out in vain hopes of stopping proliferation while it believes it still can. In such a window of perceived opportunity, the United States might take imprudent and even extreme steps – either liberal ones such as disarmament or hawkish ones such as preventive attacks. Preventing the taking of such steps is one of the key reasons why a more moderate view of proliferation's promise and purposes should receive more of a hearing now.

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**www.globalstrategyforum.org**

**events@globalstrategyforum.org**

Global Strategy Forum
8 Upper Grosvenor Street
London W1K 2LY