

We are writing in response to the publication last week of the UK's "Integrated Defence Review"

The paper's title is sadly ironic. There is nothing "integrated" about an approach to security that focuses almost exclusively on the preparations for state violence, which ignores most of the major threats facing humanity, and which does not reflect the critical development in human security concepts.

In our submission to the Review we wrote:

*"We are writing to you now at a time when humanity and the integrity of our planet are under unprecedented threat. Day by day the visible effects of the climate crisis are multiplying, together with a calamitous decline in biodiversity. Our impact on the non-human world, which we need for our very survival, is proving disastrous. The current pandemic emergency has surely shown us that change in the way we live together as fragile humans on a fragile planet is both possible and necessary."*

Since we wrote these words in September last year the climate and ecological breakdown has intensified and the ongoing pandemic crisis is further revealing just how vital it is that we tackle the challenges in a spirit of global equality and collaboration. The Review shows no awareness of this reality.

As an organisation committed to work for nuclear disarmament we will respond to that aspect of the Review.

On page 75 of the Review paper we read:

*However, in recognition of the evolving security environment, including the developing range of technological and doctrinal threats, this is no longer possible, and the UK will move to an overall nuclear weapon stockpile of no more than 260 warheads.*

And on page 77:

*We are strongly committed to full implementation of the NPT in all its aspects, including nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy; there is no credible alternative route to nuclear disarmament.*

The collocation of these two statements is darkly comedic in the extreme, but it is important to note that, even before this latest announcement, the UK, along with the other nuclear-armed states that are party to the Treaty, have honoured the NPT more in the breach than in the observance.

The key failure of the UK to abide by its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations is the absence over the years of any genuine movement on Article VI, with its obligation to: *pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.*

In relation to Article VI the UK has made much of the reduction in recent years in

the number of nuclear warheads it deploys and stockpiles. Reducing the number of nuclear bombs to a point where you are still able to inflict devastation at over a thousand times that unleashed on Hiroshima 75 years ago, and at the same time modernising your system to make it a more effective mass killer, is not a genuine contribution even to a “step-by-step” approach to disarmament. It is a specious and transparent attempt at window dressing.

The UK is also in breach of Article I of the Treaty which obliges state parties: *not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any non-nuclear-weapon State to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons or explosive devices.*

For the entire time in which the UK has been a party to the Treaty it has engaged with the US, under the Mutual Defence Agreement, in the exchange of nuclear weapon materials and scientific and technical expertise and continues to do so. Again, the breach of the NPT is flagrant. It is also important not to forget similar breaches carried out between France and the UK as they cooperate on military nuclear defence research through the Franco-British Teutates Treaty.

To increase the warhead stockpile at the same time as claiming to abide by the NPT is utterly disingenuous. It is however more than a breach of a key UN disarmament treaty, it is a dangerous and provocative step. It provides an excuse for any other nuclear-armed state wishing to make its own disastrous contribution to the nuclear arms race. And it provides sufficient rationale for any non-nuclear state wishing to go nuclear to conclude that the nuclear-armed states have no interest at all in the enforcement of article VI of the NPT, to conclude further that the NPT has fallen into abeyance, and to develop nuclear weapons of their own accordingly. Whatever technical reasons may lie behind the decision it is the public and international effect that is calamitous. It is also contrary to public opinion across Britain as shown in the recent Survation poll for CND UK as well as showing total disregard for the stance taken by the Scottish Parliament and Government.

The paper asserts that aside from the NPT there is no “credible alternative route to nuclear disarmament.” The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was specifically crafted to support the fulfilment of the NPT's Article VI. The idea that the TPNW undermines the NPT makes no sense when one considers that the states that have been key to the development of the TPNW have also been strong supporters of the NPT. Indeed Ireland, which ratified the TPNW last year, is credited with having practically invented the NPT. In November 2020 The Research Services of the German Bundestag published its paper “On the legal relationship between the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Non-Proliferation Treaty”. This authoritative and non-partisan study<sup>1</sup> concludes that the TPNW does not undermine the NPT but it is part of a common disarmament architecture.

We are alarmed also by the indication that the UK's nuclear weapons could be

1 <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/814856/28b27e2d04faabd4a4bc0bfd0579658c/WD-2-111-20-pdf-data.pdf>

used in response to an attack from “emerging technologies” and by the decision to withhold from citizens and parliaments information about warhead stockpile numbers. Both decisions imply the desire to achieve an operational freedom removed from both scrutiny and accountability. This is wholly inappropriate in a state which claims to be democratic.

For the UK a modest, credible and responsible “step-by-step” approach to nuclear disarmament would mean first of all to acknowledge the reality of the TPNW as a UN Treaty that has now entered into force and has worldwide support. The second step is to seek observer status at the first Meeting of State Parties of the TPNW. Continuing with the current rigid stance is simply not credible. This should be followed swiftly by acceding to the treaty and subsequently dismantling all UK nuclear weapons as soon as practically possible.

In the light of all this we have a question:

*How does the United Kingdom intend to present and defend the decision to increase its stockpile cap in the context of negotiations at the upcoming NPT Review Conference?*

We look forward to hearing from you.

In peace,

Angie Zelter, Brian Larkin, Mark Morgan and David Mackenzie

On behalf of Trident Ploughshares