Trident Ploughshares – Written evidence (NPT0005)

1. Nuclear risk - What is your evaluation of the current level of risk that nuclear weapons, of any type, could be used?

We endorse the assessment of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists that the risk is currently grave. There is first of all the underlying risk that has existed consistently since the 1950s (particularly the danger of accidental triggering) and this is now enhanced by irresponsible and erratic behaviour by leaders of the nuclear-armed states, by the increased fragility of arms control measures and by the threat of increased conflict provoked by climate breakdown.

2. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

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

Bluntly, it is the need for all the players to recognise and act on the fact that real nuclear diplomacy is not a power game but a constructive process based firmly on the recognition of the horrifying humanitarian consequences of nuclear war at any scale, and that the only satisfactory outcome is complete elimination. It will also be a process that recognises the security concerns of all.

To what extent do states still view the NPT as relevant?

Our view is that although the NPT is still regarded as a vital institution for exercising control and influence over proliferation, security and disarmament, it is now at a critical juncture, due to frustration on the part of a large number of non-nuclear states with the obstructive behaviour of the P5 in the negotiations and, in particular, the lack of any real progress on Article V1. It is this frustration that has led to the development and adoption of the TPNW.

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

It is important to note that the CTBT does not only relate to proliferation but is applicable to current nuclear-armed states. The failure of the US to ratify the CTBT, in spite of the efforts of Barack Obama, is presumably in order to have a free hand to restart testing. This failure acts as a key on other nations which have not ratified the CTBT and are in the group of 44 required for entry into force. This scenario mirrors that for the NPT – the failure of the nuclear-armed states to make credible progress on Article V1 is acting as a licence for proliferation.

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

They are of critical importance. Apart from their intrinsic value for arms control, when developed and adhered to they can be strong signs of the essential willingness to work towards a security based on fundamental human values as enshrined in international humanitarian law.

To what extent does the existence of three nuclear armed states outside the NPT (India, Israel and Pakistan) destabilise the overall regime?
Although it would clearly be beneficial if these states acceded to the NPT the main issue which is undermining the NPT is the failure of the nuclear-armed states which are parties to the Treaty to make meaningful moves towards disarmament as obliged by Article V1 of the Treaty, an obligation further strengthened by the 1996 ICJ ruling thus: "There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control."

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

It is the conventional stance of the Western powers that progress towards a WMD-free Middle East can only happen when there is general progress towards peace. Here the Cold War comparison is stark. In the 1980s detente followed a marked reduction in the mutual nuclear threat.

3. **The United States**

To what extent will the United States’ withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, as well as US efforts to achieve the de-nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, affect the wider nuclear non-proliferation regime?

These issues should be seen in the general context of the US approach which is based on the promotion of its own interests and is therefore selective in the pressure it does or does not apply to states threatening to acquire nuclear weapons. Israel and Pakistan are the obvious examples where the US blind eye has been applied as convenient to its own aims. The obvious deficit is the lack of a genuine whole-world response to the problem, a deficit which the TPNW addresses directly.

4. **Nuclear arms control**

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

Clearly the INF is in real danger given Trump's insistence on a US pull-out. It is plausible that the fundamental reason for the Bolton/Trump stance on the INF is a the wish for the US to be free of restraint. This means that the future of the new START is also very uncertain. Progress towards an FMCT is also problematic, given Pakistan's current hostility based on its wish for current stockpiles to be affected as well as future ones. Overall the fabric of nuclear weapon control is currently fragile. This perilous situation demonstrates that while nuclear arms control is essential so long as the weaponry exists, it is open to variation and periodic crisis. Genuine and complete elimination is the only viable long-term aim.

5. **Nuclear modernisation programmes**

What effect will nuclear renewal programmes have on the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime? To what extent could technological developments—including in missile capabilities, warhead strength, and verification—undermine existing non-proliferation and arms control agreements?
For all arms, including nuclear arms, there is a constant, underlying and inevitable pressure to develop, improve and extend. In the recent history of nuclear weapons accepted restrictions on numbers have been to a large extent by-passed by technological improvement on the part of the established nuclear-armed states, for example in better targetting. For non-nuclear states (excluding the clients and “umbrella” users of nuclear-armed states) this is seen as a clear sign of the lack of any real intention to act on Article V1 of the NPT.

5.

6. **New technologies**

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

The US ASAT anti-satellite programme and the Russian Avangard boost-glide warhead illustrate the destabilising technological edge of the nuclear arms race. Autonomous and cyber weaponry, including underwater drones, are oncoming features that will affect nuclear weapons. Submarine drones threaten to make ICBM submarines obsolete.

6.

7. **The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

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

The TPNW is having an affect on the proliferation and disarmament discourse even before entry into force, as shown by a number of institutional disinvestments and by its concentration on fundamentals. When in force its cross-border features as in Article 1, e), f) and g) will have a cumulative effect and its identity with other weapon banning treaties will critically move nuclear weapons into the pariah category. In this respect and as regards its focus on genuine progress towards elimination it will serve as an essential lever for Article V1 of the NPT.

8. **The P5**

What are the policies of other P5 countries (China, France, Russia and the United States), and the UK’s other partners, on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and on nuclear weapons more generally? Have these policies changed, and if so, why? How effective has the P5 process been, and what role will it have in the future?

Since the NPT conferences are based on a consensus process, undue power and influence over review measures are wielded by the P5 who are therefore able to veto initiatives aimed at making progress on Article V1. It is this ability to control or sabotage review outcomes that makes the NPT a relatively comfortable forum for the P5 in their aim of maintaining the status quo. Their approach is therefore to manage unacceptable risk rather than to reduce it, a stance that has no long-term validity. For that reason they are hostile to the TPNW.

Public statements by P5 members carry a contradiction. On the one hand the TPNW is described as vacuous and on the other as a threat to the stability of the current disarmament and arms control regime and to the NPT in particular. The US, with the UK as a compliant partner, is applying background pressure on non-nuclear states not to sign and ratify the Treaty. In its leaked communication to NATO states in advance
of the adoption of the Treaty the US urged a vote against adoption on the grounds of the potential effectiveness of the Treaty to critically hamper the “extended nuclear deterrence” it claims to provide.

9. The role of the UK

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

With the exception of its alignment with the EU over Iran the UK doggedly complies with US nuclear policy, a position recently confirmed by its approval for the US decision to withdraw from the INF, and goes down its own road of renewal and modernisation. This is tragic, given the potential for the UK as relatively small nuclear-armed state to take a leadership role in global disarmament as the first nuclear-armed state to disarm. The UK government’s current response to the TPNW shows clearly that the profession of enthusiasm for multilateral disarmament is utterly hollow. There is the additional folly of continuing with the new Trident amidst fiscal uncertainties and the chaotic nature of the renewal programme. There is significant popular support for the UK to at least engage with the TPNW. In the case of Scotland there is overwhelming parliamentary support and a popular sense of being ignored and over-ruled by the Westminster government.

These factors provide the UK with a unique opportunity to play a positive role at the 2019 NPT Preparatory Committee. As a first step it should make common cause with those states which are determined that the TPNW will be firmly on the Committee’s agenda. It also should make sure that Scottish parliamentarians are included in the UK delegation to the Conference.

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