This response to the International Relations Committee inquiry is offered jointly by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. Our four UK denominations have a lengthy history of engagement around defence and disarmament, establishing working groups and producing publications to inform both our churches’ policy and public debate. Our churches seek to ensure that we are sufficiently well-informed to evaluate the ethical and theological questions around nuclear use and possession.

Christians view each human individual as made in the image of God and affirm the sanctity of all human life. We consider that peace has a qualitative aspect requiring relationship, an understanding of the other and freedom from fear. This has bearing on our approach to nuclear weapons and deterrence.

We offer this consultation response fully appreciating the distinctive capacity of government to undertake analysis to ensure the security of our nation but remain convinced that contemporary Christian ethics has a vital contribution to make. Our response is confined to the questions posed around nuclear risk, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and nuclear arms control, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the P5 and an effective role for UK government.

**Nuclear risk**

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

1. In 2015, the UK Government assessed that the current level of risk that nuclear weapons would be used was low.\(^1\) Such assessments are always controversial. There is widespread concern, however, that the risk is increasing as great power relations deteriorate, trust in leaders’ capacities to manage crises diminishes, and regional tensions persist in South Asia and elsewhere. There are also worries that arguments put forward for lower-yield missiles and an expanded role for nuclear weapons increase the risk of their future use (either use by design or through miscalculation – see below). Our Churches endorse the consensus of recent intergovernmental conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons which assert that these weapons must never be used again under any circumstances and that only their total elimination can guarantee that outcome.

**Risks of nuclear weapons use by design**

2. A taboo over the use of nuclear weapons has been inherited from the Cold War era. The moral objections and public disapproval over nuclear weapons use, and the reputational damage that would be suffered by any state using them, help to temper the risk of a deliberate and calculated launch of nuclear weapons.\(^2\) The backdrop of heightened

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\(^1\) The 2015 National Security Risk Assessment noted that the risk of international conflict was growing in relation to hybrid warfare and a blurring of the boundaries between civil disorder and military conflict. There is no reference to change in the 2010 SDSR assessment of risk from attack using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons.

\(^2\) UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres reflected the views of many when he stated at the 2018 UN General Assembly that “no other technology, no other weapon of mass destruction, has the capacity to, quite literally, change the face of the earth, eradicating entire societies”. 
international tensions particularly with respect to Russia raises legitimate concerns around the risk of further warfare in Eastern Europe. But the existing taboo with respect to nuclear weapons militates against a hybrid war such as that in Ukraine becoming nuclear. This conceptual separation of conventional and nuclear warfare is critical and must be maintained.

3. It is therefore disturbing that the concept of a ‘limited’ nuclear strike could become more instrumental in the security policies of some of the five NPT-recognised nuclear weapons states (P5). The Russian ‘escalate to de-escalate’ policy keeps open the possibility of the use of low-yield nuclear weapons in response to an overwhelming conventional attack on Russian interests (including in Eastern Europe). The US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) 2018 proposes the development of new low yield nuclear weapons in order to provide a credible deterrent to perceived Russian nuclear posture. This appears to be a classic example of escalating threat and counter threats in response to ‘worst case’ assessments.\(^3\) If not checked, this trend is likely to expand the circumstances in which nuclear weapons might be used; it will re-inforce the place of weapons of mass destruction in deterrence concepts and commit states to the development of new forms of nuclear weapons involving very long development timeframes at high cost.

4. The expansion of the range of circumstances in which nuclear weapons might be used increases the likelihood of actual use in the future. The current poor state of Russia, UK and US relations makes progress in arms control challenging. The United States, UK and NATO would therefore do well to place greater emphasis on non-nuclear components of deterrence rather than expanding the role of nuclear weapons. The concept of a ‘limited’ nuclear war is a dangerous gamble that should have no place in responsible deterrence concepts.

**Risks of nuclear weapons use through mis-calculation**

5. As nuclear weapons continue to be maintained in a state of day-to-day readiness, the possibility of their use through miscalculation remains uncomfortably high. The unilateral initiative by the UK in 2006 to stand down its one and only nuclear weapons system such that missiles may take some days to be readied to fire is a welcome contribution to global de-alerting of nuclear weapons.

**The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**

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

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

6. Few other international treaties have achieved as high a status as that of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It commands near universal membership, has significant diplomatic representation at Review Conferences and is generally thought to have constrained the proliferation of nuclear weapons over the past 50 years.

7. A strength of the NPT has been its ability to engage the P5 and non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) in dialogue. Through compromise, the NPT has helped to reconcile differing aspirations. This process is contingent on a shared recognition of the need for a balance of responsibilities across the NPT’s three pillars of non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful

\(^3\) There is much academic literature dating back to Thomas Schelling’s “Arms and Influence” to underpin deterrence theory. The established theoretical work acknowledges that calculated ambiguity must be well calibrated if it is not to result in an escalatory spiral of threat and counter threat driven by fear of the unknown.
uses, although what constitutes ‘balance’ is contested. But levels of trust in the NPT have diminished as it is perceived that the P5 states have compromised this balance through their word and deed. Although trust in the NPT has also been affected by a small number of instances of non-compliance, the unilateral adoption of aggressive counter-proliferation policies, especially by the US in the early 2000s and again over Iran, has not helped.

8. The investment of most nuclear weapons states (NWS) in new warheads, enhanced delivery systems and nuclear weapons research will cost trillions of US dollars. This suggests a commitment on the part of the NWS to maintain the current nuclear order possibly to the end of this century. Unfortunately, the US-Russian strategic arms reduction (START) processes has stalled, and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987, that eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons, is imperilled. Furthermore, with the work plan in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva deadlocked, there has been little in the way of concrete progress on multilateral arms control and disarmament for two decades. The overall impression is that the P5 are utilising the NPT to maintain indefinitely the imbalance in power and status among states. This has clearly weakened the commitment of some NNWS to the NPT. The NPT could be fundamentally undermined if just one or two nations were to follow North Korea’s example and withdraw.

9. In summary, there is no obvious alternative to the NPT that could, in the near future, command such near universal support and its preservation should be a priority for P5, their allies and NNWS alike. In this respect the UK Government must do more to reassure NNWS that it is actively working on disarmament through changing doctrines, progressively reducing the prominence of nuclear weapons in the UK’s national security strategy, and developing technical means of verifying and preparing for nuclear disarmament.

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

10. The CTBT, concluded in 1996, has not entered into force despite widespread international support. The US Senate’s regrettable refusal to consent to US ratification has been a particular obstacle, not least by giving shelter to China, India and other hold-outs. Nonetheless, the Treaty’s ban on the conduct of explosive testing has been largely respected (DPRK being the one exception), and its seismic verification system has been shown to be highly effective. Whatever the impediments, the UK Government should continue to press for the ratifications that would enable the CTBT to enter into force.

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

11. The rules-based international order is most obviously challenged by rising nationalist movements and leaders in several states making political support for multilateral institutions and international law even more difficult. The disrespect shown for international law and order by current Russian and US leaders has been especially disconcerting. The UK should continue to emphasize the great value that it attaches to the rule-based order and its further development, of which the NPT is a prominent example.

12. Confidence in a rules–based international order depends in part on an effective verification regime that guards against non-compliance. Crucial to the field of non-proliferation is the IAEA inspection regime comprising the Comprehensive Safeguard
Agreements and Addition Protocol undertakings. The UK should place priority in advocating for a strong IAEA-led inspection regime that can gain the trust of all parties. The UK’s commitment to generous funding of the IAEA is justified and should continue. Syria and Russia’s recent disrespect for the Chemical Weapons Convention and its verification system have created a worrying precedent that must not be allowed to affect the NPT and IAEA.

The United States

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

13. The United States decision to terminate its involvement in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) places at risk the vital IAEA inspection and verification work in Iran. IAEA inspections have determined that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA commitments, but without an effective IAEA presence Iran’s activities would be uncertain. Efforts on the part of the UK and other European Governments to seek to save the JCPOA from collapse and protect IAEA access are crucial to confidence in the non-proliferation regime as a whole. We strongly support initiatives, mandated by the 2010 NPT Review Conference and pursued under the UN’s aegis, to establish a Weapon of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East.

14. With respect to the Korean Peninsula, the World Council of Churches, United Methodist Church (US) and other ecumenical partners have had involvement in the building of trust and peaceful relationships between the North and South. We have church communities in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) as well as the South. It included measures for the reunification of families, economic projects on the border and a pledge to work towards future reunification of north and south. The declaration also seeks a peace agreement to formally end hostilities, and achieve denuclearisation and an immediate cessation on both sides of military activities. The latter has seen rapid and substantial progress with the demolishing of border posts, demining operations and the withdrawal of firearms from the UN controlled border in the Demilitarised Zone. Lasting progress will largely depend on the ability of all parties to carefully sequence the lifting of sanctions with permanent and verified disarmament initiatives on the part of the DPRK.

15. We are mindful that UK is one of the few nations with a diplomatic presence in the DPRK and traditionally has close relations with the US and South Korea. With the prospect of the DPRK seeking to exploit differences between South Korea and the US, the UK government might determine whether it can play a significant part in helping to establish dialogue on reducing sanctions in return for real progress on denuclearisation.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

Qu. 7. 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?

4 The official protestant denomination in the DPRK is the Korean Christian Federation (KCF)
5 Recent examples include the April 2018 World Council of Churches statement […] and the Atlanta ‘Roundtable process’ statement of the World Methodist Council, Korean Methodist Church and United Methodist Church.
16. In prohibiting the possession, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, the TPNW seeks to ensure that nuclear weapons have similar treatment under international law as other forms of indiscriminate weapons. While the process of multilateral disarmament is, of course, hugely complex and difficult, the treaty nevertheless builds on established legal norms and consequently the logic of prohibition is inescapable. The movement for its introduction has received support from metropolitan mayors, local government, NGOs, trade unions and, as we illustrate below, faith groups and the private sector. The UK government will need to determine how best to respond and we hope that strategies might be guided by a desire to build bridges across the widening gap between civil society voices and the state institutions of the nuclear powers on this issue.

17. With respect to the impacts of the entry into force of the treaty in international relations, there will be immediate repercussions for Nuclear Weapons States. Some repercussions are outlined in the NATO ‘non-paper’ titled “Potential Impacts of United Nations General Assembly Nuclear Ban Treaty” 17 October 2016. For example, the paper drew attention to the difficulties that would ensue around the hosting of dual use (conventional/nuclear) US Navy ships by TPNW signatory states.

18. However, as national UK churches we will focus our contribution in this response on the impacts on the private sector and civil society. Church members from across our four church denominations have campaigned for the introduction of the TPNW. The Church of Scotland, Methodist Church and United Reformed Church are among a number of UK denominations that have endorsed the TPNW at their General Assemblies or central conferences. The treaty has long been supported by the Vatican and in July 2018 was commended by the General Synod of the Church of England. The treaty also commands support from a variety of different faith groups having been the subject of international interfaith statements issued around NPT Review Conferences. The very broad civil society support for the introduction of the TPNW was recognised by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to ICAN in 2017. We recognise that the growing public awareness around the humanitarian agenda and nuclear weapons possession and use will initially have greater impact on policy in the liberal democracies of the West than elsewhere. As faith communities we seek to work with partners across all faiths and cultures to find alternative non-violent approaches to addressing crisis and conflict.

19. Our churches also have influence with the private sector though our institutional investment policies and through our advocacy within the investment management community as a whole. Investment policies of some major financial institutions and banks currently impose exclusions on investment in companies involved in controversial weapons banned by international treaties. Nuclear weapons are sometimes also excluded from investment alongside chemical and biological and other weapons, even though nuclear weapons are not (yet) the subject of an established treaty ban. If the TPNW were to enter into force we believe that it will have significant implications for companies such as BAe Systems (in relation to securing financing for major defence projects) and SERCO Group (with respect to reputation and ability to compete in open tenders for local authority and municipal contracts).

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6 Faith groups have also contributed to interpreting and developing the just war tradition. This acknowledges that as a last resort a legitimate authority may be required to use force to restore law and order or right an injustice. Such actions must be subject to internationally accepted Human Rights principles and International Humanitarian Law.

7 Typically investors operating negative screening policies might avoid companies with substantial involvement in conventional weapons/defence and avoid companies with any exposure at all in controversial/nuclear weapons.
20. In addition, as the UK pensions industry goes through a period of fundamental change, the ethics of pension scheme investments is rising in public awareness. The NEST pension scheme established by the UK Government operates an exclusion policy on investment in firms involved in the manufacture or sale of controversial weapons (interestingly it is maybe the only market area where NEST adopts a strategy of exclusion rather than engagement to address environmental, social or governance concerns). At the moment the NEST policy on controversial weapons does not extend to nuclear weapons. Once the TPNW enters into force, NEST and other large national pension schemes are likely to come under pressure to treat nuclear weapons in a similar way to chemical/biological weapons, cluster munitions and other weapons banned by international treaties.

21. International law is derived in part from the principles of humanity and from the dictates of public conscience. The trend with respect to nuclear weapons, an understanding of the humanitarian consequences and international law is clear.\(^8\) In the light of this movement, we urge the UK Government to consider how the comprehensive legal prohibition provided by the TPNW could eventually facilitate the step-by-step approach that it has long advocated that seeks a progressive reduction of the place of nuclear weapons in security policies. We believe that the current approach of the UK Government (along with other members of the P5) to attack rather than engage constructively with the TPNW and its supporters is ultimately short-sighted.

The P5

**Qu. 8. 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?**

22. The P5 process was initiated in 2009 with strong support from the UK hosting its first meeting in London. When hosting the P5 in London in 2014 the UK government provided the first opportunity for P5 ambassadors to engage with civil society organisations (including representatives of faith groups).

23. The P5 agreement of a standard reporting form to the NPT is a welcome innovation that we hope might encourage greater transparency from all members including China and Russia. But overall, and disappointingly, the P5 have had a little success in pursuing an agenda of substance. The overall ambition of the P5 process has been timid. While agreement on definitions and reporting standards may be necessary, future success is likely to be measured in terms of the quality of discussion around nuclear doctrines, arms control and disarmament. NNWS will seek evidence of the endorsement by P5 states of their “unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapons states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals" that they signed up to in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, reiterated in the 2010 NPT Action Plan.

The role of the UK

**Qu. 9. How effective a role has the UK played in global nuclear diplomacy in recent years? How could the UK more effectively engage on nuclear non-proliferation and**

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\(^8\) For example one can examine a trend in theological assessment of nuclear policy starting from the publication of the Church and the Bomb and UK church resolutions of the early 1980s and evolving towards the contemporary positions of global or UK churches that typically reject the permanent institutionalisation of nuclear deterrence doctrine.
24. **Dialogue between states on non-proliferation:** Our churches laid out a number of recommendations that were discussed with the Foreign Office in advance of the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting. The challenge for 2020 is to retain the trust of NNWS to dialogue and commitment to the NPT. The UK has taken leadership in past through the initiation of the P5 process, its launch with Norway of the project on verifying the dismantlement of nuclear warheads, and its unilateral declarations on reducing the warhead numbers. There is a need now for a small group of states to bridge the gap between NWS (and allies) and NNWS. We see no reason why the UK should not now assume a leadership role in promoting such dialogue through international governmental conferences convened outside of the ossified structures of the Conference on Disarmament with the intention of exploring the shape of a likely path towards a world without nuclear weapons.

25. **No First Use:** The UK is party to NATO’s policy of first-use of nuclear weapons. It has rejected Chinese and other calls for universal adoption of a no-first-use policy. The UK’s 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review introduced an assurance that UK nuclear weapons would not, however, be used against NNWS that are in compliance with the NPT. The UK’s motivation in this regard is to build confidence and the government is committed to take further tangible steps towards a safer and more stable world where countries with nuclear weapons feel able to relinquish them. Since then the widespread humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons have become even better appreciated. The UK government should therefore consider further reducing the nuclear component in its deterrence concepts. It is not clear that the deliberate ambiguity around ‘first use’ is in any way helpful and the UK could establish a leadership role by affirming (in common with some other NWS) that, in the future, the UK will never be the first to use nuclear weapons.

26. **Warhead dismantlement and verification:** In 2010 the UK took an early initiative in pioneering collaborative research on disarmament verification techniques. But the UK has not placed the fissile material removed from its current warhead dismantlement programme under international safeguards. Nor has the UK adhered to the principle of irreversibility by declaring fissile material as no longer required for military purposes. Consequently the UK is missing an opportunity to establish norms that would support non-proliferation as well as disarmament.

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9 Proposed UK report to the Preparatory Committee for the Ninth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. 2014. (The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Free Churches Group, the Methodist Church, the Quakers and the United Reformed Church)

10 For example the UK could follow the practice of the United States in declaring HEU for weapons use separately to that for use in the propulsion units of nuclear-powered submarines reinforcing the principle of the non-transfer of materials between these two uses that should apply to NWS and NNWS states alike. See Ritchie, N. “The UK Naval Nuclear Propulsion Programme and Highly Enriched Uranium”, (2015, University of York)

11 In 2014 Church leaders (Baptist, Methodist and URC) queried with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) the UK’s decision not to transfer fissile material from dismantled warheads out of the military stockpile. After some engagement, the FCO ultimately offered no substantive objection but no future commitment, relying instead on the long-standing (technically correct) assertion that our existing IAEA protocols do not legally oblige the UK to honour action 17 of the 2010 NPT Action Plan. This FCO defence of inaction is problematic in itself as it implies that the UK is prepared to sit lightly to commitments that it has agreed to at the 2010 NPT Review Conference and to the principle of irreversibility agreed in 2000 (steps 5 and 10 within the 13 steps appearing the 2000 NPT Review Conference consensus statement). The New Start programme has demonstrated that it is possible to overcome the technical challenges of protecting proliferation-sensitive information related to warhead design.
transparent and accountable transfer of HEU and other fissile material from dismantled warheads to civilian stocks under international safeguards.

27. We appreciate the opportunity to offer evidence to this inquiry. We look forward to the publication of the findings and government response and will use this to further inform our work with church members and Members of Parliament.

Received 17 January 2019