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

1.1 Relations between Nuclear Weapons States are deteriorating, trust is eroding and perceptions of threat increasing. Rising tensions and provocative behaviours increase the risks of accident, of miscalculation and even of nuclear confrontation. Uncertainties around new technologies may also heighten threat perceptions.

1.2 There is on the other hand a certain sense of optimism, with talks between the US and DPRK taking place at the highest level. There is here a historic opportunity after 70 years of resolving the Korean Peninsula issue politically through dialogue and consultation. Positive movement here would be of great significance not only for security in North East Asia, a region of huge economic importance for the world, as well as for arms control in general, involving the improvement of relations between the three major Nuclear Weapons States (NWS), the US, China and Russia.

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

2.1. **Nuclear weapons modernisation:** NWS are committing to, in some cases, huge investments in nuclear weapons modernisation. This is underpinned by the view that a strong nuclear deterrent provides the best way of convincing other nuclear powers to engage in meaningful arms control initiatives. The opposite has occurred: nuclear weapons proliferate and the NPT has been driven into a stalemate. NWS should take into consideration how other countries might perceive and react upon their own nuclear policies, both in words and deeds.

2.2 **Getting the right balance between disarmament and non-proliferation:** As more and more countries have developed the capabilities to extract nuclear weapons grade materials, there is a potential increasing risk of nuclear proliferation. But NPT negotiations have departed from their original approach of balancing non-proliferation and disarmament. The emphasis in recent years has been on a ‘crisis of compliance’ involving states such as Iran and North Korea with the focus of negotiations on strengthening commitments to the Additional Protocol, tightening the export of nuclear materials, and increasing the use of sanctions. On the other hand, little progress has been made, for example, towards a Nuclear Weapons Convention or at least a legally-binding treaty on negative security assurances. The US and Russia have failed to make sufficient progress through START in reducing their warheads, these being far in excess of the numbers held by other NWS, and there has been no progress on the NPT commitment to convene a conference on a WMD-free Middle East. As a result, the NPT has been criticised in particular by non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) for ‘double standards’.

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

2a. 1 Given lack of progress outlined above, states have resorted to UN processes to achieve their goals: the US is pursuing non-proliferation through sanctions on the UN Security Council whilst non-nuclear weapons states gained support for, and are now
seeking ratification of, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. They are also seeking to convene a conference on the Middle East under UN auspices.

2a. Views on the continuing relevance of the NPT among both NNWS and NWS is varied. China remains committed to dialogue among NWS through the NPT as a way of building understandings with a view to reducing threat perceptions.

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

2b.1 The US 2018 Nuclear Posture Review explicitly renounced the idea of ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). China will not ratify unless the US does.

2b. A treaty on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space is a matter of great urgency.

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

2c.1 Given that the success of a rules-based international order requires trust between the major nuclear powers, arms control treaties form the fundamental underpinning.

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

2d.1 The fact that these new nuclear powers have been allowed to develop without much censure whilst other states such as Iran and the DPRK are served with sanctions can be seen as another example of double standards, undermining the credibility of the NPT and the arms control regime as a whole.

2d.2 The existence of these NWS destabilises their regional orders and so contributes to an overall instability in the international situation. These states should be brought into the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states based on an agreed commitment, including a timetable and verification process, to disarm.

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

2e.1 The agreement by the NPT to hold a conference on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East in 2012 has never been adhered to. As stated above, those supporting the suggestions have resorted to pursuing the matter through the UN calling for a conference to be held in 2019.

2e.2 The matter obviously has implications for Isreal’s nuclear weapons. It is also linked to the Iran nuclear deal: should the JCPOA fail to restrain Iran this would risk the proliferation of nuclear weapons across the region.

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?

3.1 As stated above, US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal would deeply damage the wider non-proliferation regime. On Korean denuclearisation, the difficulty appears
to be that the US and the DPRK do not share the same conception of what this means, that is whether it is simply a matter of the DPRK getting rid of its nuclear weapons or whether this involves the Korean peninsula as a whole, including restraints by other powers.

3.2 Should the US and the DPRK come to a shared understanding of the aims of talks, then this would start improve the wider East Asian security environment dramatically, including relations between the other Nuclear Weapons States in the region - US, China and Russia. This would clearly be highly significant for the P5 in the NPT.

4. **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)?**

4.1. The implementation of missile defence systems has destabilised arms control agreements and the development of new technologies is adding to that. The shift of economic weight from West to East also seems to be impacting on perceptions and assessments of existing military power balances.

4.2. The US, in its 2018 National Security Strategy, has shifted its focus from the threat of terrorism to that from ‘revisionist powers’, stating: “Russia and China are pursuing asymmetric ways and means to counter US conventional capabilities, thereby increasing the risk of miscalculation and the potential for military confrontation with the United States, its allies and partners.” From this point of view the existing nuclear arms control agreements are no longer considered to be adequate.

4.3 China in particular is catching up fast in key areas of advanced technologies which increase the effectiveness of its anti-access/area denial (A2AD) strategy causing concern for the US security strategy in the East Asian region. China is not covered by the INF and has been investing in and modernising its ground based cruise and ballistic missiles systems which would have the capability to strike US bases, for example in Okinawa and Guam, and possibly destroy a US aircraft carrier in a single strike. India, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and other states - all not party to the INF - are or have also been developing these capabilities.

4.4 Any suggestion of extending or replacing the bilateral INF with a multilateral treaty to cover the new developments, either involving China or other powers, should take into consideration the following points: (i) other powers including China have far fewer numbers of nuclear weapons than do the US and Russia; (ii) China, India and Pakistan all have a nuclear policy of ‘no first use’; (iii) whilst the INF has banned the development of land-based missile systems by the US and Russia, sea-based and air launched missile systems have proliferated.

4.5 Therefore, any negotiations to include China or a wider range of powers in the INF would need to be based on substantial reductions in nuclear warheads by the US and Russia, a commitment by all other NWS to a ‘no first use’ posture, and with a remit to cover all types of ballistic missile.

4.6 The US and Russia need to agree to make further deep-cut commitments to their nuclear arsenals under START. This would be a key step to ending the NPT stalemate.
4.7 For a Fissile Materials Cut Off Treaty to make progress, it needs to take account of widely differing sizes of stockpiles. Agreement on a moratorium on fissile materials would require concessions by only one NWS, China which maintains a comparatively small stockpile of material. This imbalanced approach creates more instability and tensions. A treaty should then include a commitment to reductions in stockpiles.

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

5.1 The issue of double standards undermining the credibility of arms control agreements has already been mentioned. Missile defence, together with the development of low yield warheads, are profoundly destabilising, stoking mistrust and intensifying threat perceptions. Verification processes must be seen to be even-handed, as a matter of political accommodation not just a technicality. This has not been the case in dealing with the denuclearisation of the DPRK where demands ‘complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament has been an obstacle to the dialogue process.

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

6.1 With a wide range of emerging non-nuclear technologies that could sabotage and undermine a country’s nuclear launch capability, it becomes almost impossible to assess security threats. This could influence decisions about what would constitute a credible deterrent leading to increasing numbers of warheads and missile systems. Efforts should focus on building basic common understandings on the impact of new technologies on nuclear stability.

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?

7.1 How the TPNW relates to negotiations between the P5 in the NPT is unclear.

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?

8.1 The US is committed to a huge nuclear arms modernisation programme. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review reversed the previous policy of promoting nuclear arms control: rather it places new emphasis on the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy, promoting the development of new nuclear capabilities, including low-yield tactical nuclear weapons, and broadening the number of non-nuclear attack scenarios which might lead to a nuclear response by the United States.

8.2 China has just a small arsenal of some 240 nuclear warheads and maintains that the US and Russia, having the largest nuclear arsenals, bear the main responsibility for nuclear disarmament and should take the initiative by making further substantial
reductions of their arsenals. China is the only NPT nuclear-weapon state to commit to an unconditional no-first-use posture, a commitment which is deeply embedded in their military thinking, and policy-making. There is no credible evidence that China intends to conduct “limited nuclear use” first in a conventional war as some in the US military establishment suspect. (see Tong Zhao: What the United States can do to stabilise its nuclear relationship with China, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Jan/Feb, 2019 https://thebulletin.org/2019/01/what-the-united-states-can-do-to-stabilize-its-nuclear-relationship-with-china/?utm_source=Bulletin%20blast&utm_medium=iContact%20email&utm_campaign=Stabilize_01072019)

8.3 On the other hand, the new US plans for nuclear modernisation and shifts in its posture have created anxieties in China of a heightened US nuclear threat. These deep concerns over US strategic intentions have only increased with the announcement of the US intention to withdraw from the INF Treaty. Fears that the US intends to advance its first-strike capability against China is driving some, as yet limited, domestic calls in China to greatly expand its nuclear arsenal and to make no-first-use policy conditional. Should the US in fact proceed with plans to deploy medium-range missiles in Guam or in South Korea or Japan this would put enormous pressure on China to withdraw from its commitment. A highly dangerous nuclear arms race in the Asia-Pacific region could ensue.

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

9.1 Although the UK government has made reductions to the numbers of warheads, striking its nuclear stockpiles, it is currently engaged in a Trident replacement programme contrary to stated commitments to a nuclear free world and its obligations under the NPT.

9.2 The UK government should make clear it will in no way involve itself in, or support or participate in any way, US plans as per the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review. It should use its offices under the US-UK Special Relationship to dissuade the US from its current path of potential confrontation with China and Russia. It should itself take a bold initiative for example by taking its nuclear weapons off alert and seeking a mutual non-targeting agreement with both or either of these NWS.

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