Q1: Nuclear risk

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

The risk that nuclear weapons might be used militarily has grown over the past year and into 2019 due to two separate factors:

- Russia’s military and civilian leaders appear to believe that they could use low-yield nuclear weapons in small numbers to cement a victory in landgrab against NATO. To prevent such a dangerous miscalculation NATO must have firm resolve and a demonstrated will and capability to respond if attacked.
- Pakistani terrorists are again conducting deadly strikes inside India; a major Indian response, which has been threatened in the past, could well ignite a full scale war on the sub-continent with risk of escalation to the use of nuclear weapons.

Q2: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

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?
   b. What are the prospects for other components of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty (CTBT)?
   c. How important are these agreements to the wider rules-based international order?
   d. To what extent does the existence of three nuclear armed states outside the NPT (India, Israel and Pakistan) destabilise the overall regime?
   e. What prospects are there for a Middle East WMD free zone?

The central governments of over 190 states believe the NPT is vital to their security interests because, for most of them, the treaty prevents their neighbors from developing nuclear weapons and thereby relieves them of the burden of responding to such a development. Notwithstanding this crucial fact, and the enormous harm that would befall these countries’ security if the treaty was abandoned, a small, Geneva and New York based, group of ideologues continue to argue that the treaty is in peril because the nuclear weapons states have not eliminated all of their nuclear weapons, thereby rendering the treaty pointless. This wrongheaded view not only ignores signatories’ security but also two other important points. First, the U.S., the U.K. and France have reduced their nuclear arsenals dramatically since the end of the Cold War while Russia has maintained a bloated nuclear force and China is busily expanding its own. Second, therefore, the existence of the P3 arsenals is an essential force for peace which deters Russian and Chinese use of nuclear weapons or of massive conventional force. As long as the ideologues continue to pursue their threats to the NPT and to agitate for a nuclear free world when international conditions still require P3 nuclear deterrents to maintain stability, the more difficult NPT review conferences will be.

Prospects for a CTBT are nil because the chances of achieving the required number of ratifications are nil.
Q3: The United States

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?

If U.S. and North Korean diplomatic efforts are in fact able to denuclearize North Korea in a transparent and verifiable manner, this will be a major accomplishment which should boost the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and further stabilize the security situation in North Asia. Removing North Korea’s nuclear potential would go far to remove a major proliferator from dangerous activities around the world.

Q4: Nuclear arms control

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)?

At the outset, it is vital to recognize that Russia is a serial violator of international arms control treaties and agreements. Today Russia – while pretending to act responsibly and to be adhering to them -- stands in violation of nine accords: the Helsinki Final Act; the Budapest Agreement; the Istanbul Accord; the George H.W. Bush-Gorbachev Presidential Nuclear Initiative; the George H. W. Bush-Yeltsin Presidential Nuclear Initiative; the Chemical Weapons Convention; the Open Skies Agreement; the Vienna Document; and the INF Treaty. This history suggests that if future arms agreements are to be concluded with Russia, then a return to the more intrusive verification arrangements of the original START Treaty and the INF Treaty (before those INF measures were terminated) will be necessary to forestall and detect future Russian cheating.

Despite the inelegant way the U.S. rolled out its approach to Russian cheating on the INF treaty, the fact is that Russia had been cheating on the treaty for years. It has multiple battalions equipped with a total of about 100 treaty-violating missiles deployed today. No Western counterpart system has even been conceived, let alone developed, tested, and deployed. Despite this history of Russian cheating and prevarication, the U.S. Government has yet to take a position on the potential extension of the New START treaty, so hand-wringing over that treaty’s fate is premature. Those who truly believe in arms control should, instead, turn their thinking as to how Russia’s bloated arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons can be captured in an arms treaty, perhaps one which succeeds New START and covers all U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons.

Given a successful Pakistani and Chinese effort for decades to block an FMCT, there is no reason to hope that this treaty can be achieved under current conditions.

Q5: Nuclear modernisation programmes
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?

For the past ten years Russia and China have been engaged in major efforts to modernize (and in China’s case, expand) their nuclear forces. The Russians have been fielding tens each of two new types of ICBMs for years, and a new destabilizing heavy ICBM is about to enter their forces; similarly, there are four new Russian SSBNs in the water. The Blackjack bomber production line has been re-opened and hundreds of new ground-, sea- and air-launched cruise missiles have been built and deployed. Mr. Putin also routinely boasts about new exotic nuclear systems Russia is building (for example the “Kanyon” transoceanic terror-weapon torpedo and the nuclear powered cruise missile). China has been deploying for years tens each of two new types of ICBMs, has four new SSBNs with another building, is seeking to build a new long-range bomber, and has the most formidable ballistic missile program in the world. Neither the U.S. nor the U.K. have deployed a new nuclear system in this century. Indeed, the nuclear modernization programs of the U.S. and the U.K. will not begin to field new systems until the mid-to-late 2020s. Without modernization the existing American and British systems will have to be retired without replacement, leaving the West without a deterrent to the new Russian and Chinese forces. So it should be clear that the Western programs are vital to global stability, without which there are no chances for further disarmament.

Q6: New technologies

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

It is difficult to answer this question in the abstract. Certainly, however, emerging trends in cyber weapons, space weapons and advanced conventional weapons have the potential to destabilize relations among the Great Powers.

Q7: The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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?

This ill-conceived, superficially attractive, and populist treaty resembles in dangerous ways the 1930’s Peace Union pledge and its brethren which undercut Britain’s (and the West’s) resolve to stand-up to Axis aggression when it could have been halted, thus resulting in the carnage of World War II. The treaty conceives of nuclear weapons as the over-riding problem to resolve rather than recognizing that preventing war among the Great Powers is the paramount security problem of our era. Furthermore, as with the Peace Union pledge, the Ban Treaty only exerts political pressure in the Western democracies, and not at all on the Russian and Chinese governments.
Q8: The P5
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?

It is an enormous to mistake to believe that there is a coherent view among the P5 on most matters. Thankfully, all five support the Non Proliferation Treaty and view the spread of nuclear weapons as inimical to global stability. Outside the NPT context, there is a P3 and two others. American, British and French policies on nuclear weapons are based on a defensive concept of deterrence designed to prevent nuclear and major conventional aggression against themselves and their allies. Russian nuclear policy has devolved over the past two decades to feature the use of Russia’s nuclear weapons to intimidate and cow Moscow’s neighbors in peacetime, and – dangerously-- to contemplate, plan for, equip for and exercise for nuclear weapons use to consolidate aggressive gains achieved by conventional forces in wartime. China’s nuclear policies are deliberately opaque but are beginning to resemble Russia’s peacetime and projected wartime policies.

Q9: The Role of the UK
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

The UK is a major force for good and stability in the world. After the United States, it has the largest and most capable military establishment in NATO. Importantly, unlike France, the U.K. commits its nuclear deterrent to the defense of NATO, and thereby provides a critical second center of decision making which reduces the chances of miscalculation by Putin and his leadership circle. In this context, the U.K.’s priorities for the 2020 NPT Review Conference should be to prevent the Conference from doing harm to its and its allies ability to prevent major war.

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