Rt Hon Lord Browne of Ladyton, Vice-Chair, Nuclear Threat Initiative and former Secretary of State for Defence – Written evidence (NPT0044)

This written evidence is a supplement to Lord Browne’s oral evidence to the Select Committee provided 16 January 2019. The purpose is to cover those questions posed by the Committee that were not sufficiently addressed during the oral evidence and to focus on recommendations in advance of the 2020 Review Conference of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

I. Is it fair to say that arms control is breaking down? If so, what effect will this have on nuclear risk.

1. We are witnessing a disintegration of arms control. Leaders should recall that, in the past, each time a new US-Soviet or US-Russian nuclear arms control agreement was signed, the parties immediately started negotiations for the next one.

2. Today, nine years after approval of the 2010 New START Treaty, there is no agreed process or agenda for next steps on nuclear disarmament and risk reduction between Russia and the United States, who between them still possess over 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons.¹

3. At the same time, we are witnessing a collapse of the arms control architecture that we have relied on for the past several decades. The Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) is under threat, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) is not being implemented, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has not entered into force, and there is no consensus to commence negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is also in danger of collapse.²

4. Important negotiations are deadlocked and cooperative steps that would improve the security of all parties are on hold. At a moment of friction and conflict when restraint is needed, arms control is failing; trust is being eroded precisely when it is most needed.

5. While nuclear arms control is dormant, US-Russian relations are severely strained, raising concerns about nuclear risk. Dangerous military incidents have occurred and official statements emphasizing nuclear capabilities have implied the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used, reviving fears of possible military conflict that could potentially lead to nuclear escalation between Russia and the US.³

6. If the INF Treaty collapses in mutual Moscow-Washington recrimination and the US and Russia allow the current political tension to undermine the possibility of the extension of the New START Treaty (which must be agreed before February 2021) and the negotiation of its successor, the US and Russia will return to an unregulated nuclear arms competition that has not been seen since the early days the Cold War.

³https://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/NTI_Paper_Roadmap_for_Nuclear_Policy_and_Posture_FINAL.pdf?_=1532986315)
7. Such a collapse would occur in the context of the recent US nuclear posture review that seemingly expands the role of nuclear weapons in US national security policy; concerns about Russia’s nuclear doctrine and the new weapons it is developing, as well as its "hybrid" warfare activity along the NATO-Russia fault line; and worsening tensions between the West and Russia.

8. As a matter of highest priority, there is an urgent and immediate requirement to restore dialogue and rebuild US-Russian relations. Because of the nuclear risks this situation poses, the US and Russian leaders should make a new declaration reconfirming their common view that “a nuclear war cannot be won, and must never be fought.” If the US and Russia were to lead, other nuclear armed states, including the UK, are likely to join such a statement.4

9. Dialogue should not be treated as a bargaining chip. The US, NATO and Russia should revive and strengthen all channels of communication between political, military and intelligence leaders through direct bilateral channels and the NATO-Russia Council to avoid the risk of conflict and miscalculation.

II. How should the UK engage with Russia?

10. Realistically, it could be many years before European countries could expect that the US and Russia will resume joint responsibility for setting a more positive tone and direction for the West-Russia relationship.

11. It is now time for Europe to show more leadership - leadership about its own security, but also about global threats, particularly where they are existential threats or threats that can pose a risk to our way of life.

12. If Europe is to start addressing new threats, first, it must understand these threats better. Urgently, we need to develop a Europe-wide, understanding Russia, understanding of the risks to stability inherent in the emergence of new technology. Pending improved US-Russia relations, European countries, at least among themselves, need to prepare and advocate practical proposals about how to include these new technologies and weapons systems into the existing arms control/confidence building instruments or develop new ones dedicated to these technologies/systems.5

13. At present, there are no constraints on, and little or no governmental dialogue about, a plethora of new non-nuclear technologies that are significantly destabilising, can make nuclear capabilities vulnerable and destabilise the NATO-Russia nuclear deterrent equation. Technologies include the cyber threat to nuclear C3, conventional precision strike systems and the new frontiers of artificial intelligence, such as lethal autonomous weapons. Today’s complexity and unfamiliarity with these capabilities make escalation more likely.6

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III. How effective has the P5 group been in upholding the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) regime?

14. In the current environment, the challenges we face need to be addressed by nuclear weapon states working together in a responsible way. The stress we are seeing on the NPT regime is due not just to lack of trust and divisions between the NPT Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) but also among the P5. The P5 process is therefore an important vehicle.

15. Under the Chair of the Chinese government over the past year there have been two rounds of ambassador-level P5 consultations in Geneva and a head of delegations meeting on nuclear doctrines and policies on the margin of the UN First Committee. Earlier this month, there was also a Beijing conference at the vice-ministerial level, which was the first meeting at such a level for two years.

16. It is critical that this momentum continues when the UK assumes leadership of the P-5 process after the May PrepCom and that we find opportunities for the P5 to continue to exchange information and updates on nuclear policy. Greater transparency among the P5 can help clarify misperceptions, strengthen mutual understanding, and improve predictability of nuclear policies, plans, programs, and postures. It is also critical to enable long-term disarmament.

17. In addition, it is important that the P5 create new opportunities for interactive dialogue with the NPT NNWS, including by sharing the outcomes of P5 discussions. Increased transparency between the P5 and NNWS can help strengthen accountability and build trust among the NPT members. The P5 should look at how time to serve this purpose can be allocated at NPT Preparatory Committee meetings and at the 2020 Review Conference.

IV. How should the UK be positioning itself ahead of the 2020 NPT Review Conference? Are there opportunities for the UK to pursue nuclear risk reduction measures?

18. The UK should encourage a joint effort among all nations to strengthen and revitalize the NPT. This includes making demonstrable progress by all states on concrete measures toward disarmament.

19. The following nuclear risk reduction measures taken by the UK would have a positive contribution to the NPT 2020 Review Conference, the P5 process, and Euro-Atlantic security:

- Encourage the extension of the New START Treaty and negotiations for follow-on reductions of strategic arms between the US and Russia.
- Take leadership in working with other countries, including Russia, on WMD security. In particular, emphasis should be given to improving security of nuclear and radiological materials to counter the growing danger of terrorist acts with these materials which would be catastrophic.\(^7\)
- Renew diplomatic efforts on the issues of US/NATO ballistic missile defence and strategic precision-guided conventional weapon systems.

\(^7\) [https://www.nti.org/about/projects/global-dialogue-nuclear-security-priorities/]
systems to resolve existing controversies and reach agreements ensuring that those weapon systems will not undermine strategic stability in the future.

- Help initiate a dialogue on cybersecurity focused on developing shared approaches to combating cyberthreats, in particular those that may threaten nuclear command-control and early-warning.

V. How should the UK be defining success, both for itself, and for the nonproliferation regime as a whole?

20. A successful 2020 NPT RevCon will be one where, regardless of agreeing on a final consensus document, we see countries take action to further all three of the NPT goals – disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses.

21. The disarmament goal is critical. If there is a continuing perceived lack of progress to reach the disarmament goal set out in Article VI of the NPT, we may reach the point where that failure damages the future of the NPT. If so the damage may be irreparable. With 2020 just over a year away, the UK should be alert to this possibility and should do more and encourage others to do more to demonstrate progress in meeting the NPT disarmament commitment and pledges—including, for a start, those set out in the 2010 NPT Action Plan.

22. Ideas for action, in addition to the risk reduction measures above, include:

- The NWS should engage in an ongoing dialogue on how to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies. As part of this effort, the UK should remove some of the ambiguity in its declaratory policy about use of nuclear weapons and adhere to a norm whereby we promise explicitly never to threaten nuclear use against states without nuclear weapons.
- The UK should consider issuing a statement along the lines of the Reagan-Gorbachev statement that “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Ideally this should be led by US and Russia and done in conjunction with other NWS but in the absence of such leadership the UK could act alone.
- The UK should help lead a discussion aimed at developing a set of agreed principles that all nuclear armed states would implement, including, minimum deterrence, no first use, and force postures that reduce nuclear risks by allowing more decision time for leaders. Even if such a discussion does not yield near term shifts in policies such a discussion would be valuable in its own right to help build trust and understanding.
- The UK should sustain its engagement and leadership on disarmament verification, including through the International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. It is also important to begin thinking about how to institutionalize disarmament verification over time.8
- The NWS should seriously consider all options to find a path forward on FMCT negotiations, and explore what actions can be taken on a voluntary basis by states to improve transparency of stocks, safeguards and security of these materials in the interim.

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8 [https://www.ipndv.org/](https://www.ipndv.org/)
Disarmament will not be possible until we are able to count, track and secure all such materials in such a way that creates confidence that none of it can be diverted to a weapons program.⁹

- As Chair of the P5, the UK should promote a strengthened P5 process and seek to create more opportunities for interactive dialogue among the NWS and between the NWS and the NNWS (including to facilitate better understanding about NWS nuclear use policies). Sharing perspectives and information is key for rebuilding a sense of shared understanding and purpose.

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⁹ [https://www.nti.org/analysis/reports/civilian-heu-reduction-and-elimination/]