

Interview with Abdul Minty
BBC Radio Four
The World at One
4 December 2006

Presenter: Among the objections raised over the replacement of Trident is that it would place Britain in breach of its commitments under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Signatory nations agree to move toward disarmament. One of the few to have done so is South Africa. So far it's the only country to have voluntarily given up nuclear weapons. **The country's representative to the Board of Governors of the IAEA, the UN's nuclear body, is Abdul Minty.** He's on the line now. Ambassador Minty, good afternoon.

AM: Good afternoon.

Presenter: If we did make the decision to renew our Trident system, would that put us in breach of the treaty?

AM: Well there are those who argue that rather strongly, because the treaty does require that the nuclear weapon states would effectively disarm while the rest of the members of the NPT would not develop nuclear weapons. But there are different interpretations of it. The real madness of it is that here we have an opportunity for a turn around, to move to sanity. If we continue to rely on nuclear weapons, the question is obviously who are they aimed at and who is likely to be the enemy. We all expected a peace dividend after the end of the Cold War and hoped that nuclear weapons would no longer be used. But the more important question is that one cannot have a situation where some countries claim that they require nuclear weapons and they decide that unilaterally, and then they say that no one else should have them.

Presenter: As you say, the treaty itself deals with preventing other nations acquiring them; it doesn't deal with existing nations abandoning them.

AM: No, it does. It very specifically does. The treaty was a bargain. For those of us who made South Africa sign the NPT and the rest of the international community that did, it was a real bargain. It says for us not to go nuclear. It means that those that have nuclear weapons will actually disarm. And then there are three members outside of the treaty, India, Pakistan and Israel, and now we have North Korea. So the other very important issue which is really disgraceful is that the five nuclear weapon states will not even give an assurance to the rest of the NPT members, what we call a negative security assurance, that they will not attack us first. They even refuse to give us that undertaking.

Presenter: Now if the Prime Minister says, as has been predicted, this afternoon there will be a reduction in the number of warheads and conceivably the use of fewer submarines to be patrolling that are nuclear armed, would that not be some contribution towards the spirit of the NPT?

AM: Not at all. Because you see that asks for a programme of disarmament, not arms reduction. And already the reduction that has been carried out by the Russian Federation and the United States is claimed by them to be disarmament. But that is not a programme of disarmament. It has to do with costs and other deployment factors, and not with a deliberate policy of not relying on nuclear weapons.

Presenter: Finally, what impact do you think a decision by Britain to renew would have on the leverage that we're trying to bring on North Korea and indeed on the negotiations with Iran?

AM: No, but in addition to that on the rest of the members as well. Because the international community is being told 'I can continue to smoke but you mustn't smoke – it's not good for you.' And yet, so you have to set a lead, and I think that this is a very bad example.

Presenter: Ambassador Minty, thank you.