



Abolition 2000 UK

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To achieve for the new century a global treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons

Background – our organization

Abolition 2000 UK is part of the wider Abolition 2000 - a global coalition working for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Abolition 2000 internationally was founded in the wake of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's Review Conference in 1995, which made that treaty permanent. We welcomed the 13-point programme for nuclear disarmament contained in paragraph 15 of the gloss on NPT article VI in the final report of the 2000 Review Conference. We advocate negotiations to bring about a nuclear weapons convention (designed along the lines of the chemical and biological weapons conventions) and we distribute the published model convention text together with an analysis of the problems to be overcome.

Abolition 2000 UK was founded in October 1996 and is a coordinating body for over 100 groups in Scotland, Wales and England that have signed the Abolition 2000 statement. Abolition 2000 UK exchanges information, organizes cooperative actions, produces discussion papers on the problems of nuclear weaponry, and lobbies for nuclear disarmament at the national and international levels.

Submission to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs

Inquiry on Global Security and Non-proliferation

Referring to: National Security Strategy (Cabinet Office paper Cm. 7291, March 2008)

A. General comments on Cm. 7291.

1. We found the general style and approach of Cm. 7291 rather simplistic. It fails to answer or sometimes even analyse key problems in attaining 'security' for the U.K. and elsewhere in the world. We believe that true security for the U.K. will depend upon security for other nations, states and cultures, including those that are substantially socially and politically different from our own.
2. Cm. 7291 conflates a number of very different security issues, including nuclear weapons, other WMD, terrorism, global warming, threats of pandemics, flooding, and economic problems. We do not believe that all these issues, although some are linked, can be addressed in similar ways. Each is unique and demands specific and detailed focussed attention.
3. Cm. 7291 also treats as similar or analogous some different geopolitical problem areas, most obviously including Iraq and Afghanistan. The recent history of these two states, and the historical roles of the peoples of the two states, their own governments, the UN, NATO, the 'coalition of the willing' (in Iraq), and other military agencies that have intervened in their administration and governance, requires a detailed analysis and conclusions that are specific to each case.

4. Cm. 7291 also does not distinguish clearly the roles of the different alliances of which UK is a member, especially the primarily military alliance NATO and the primarily economic and political alliance represented by the EU.

B. Specific comments on security aspects of U.K. nuclear weapons policy.

1. We have welcomed the UK's government's support for progress under the NPT (including the 13 points agreed in 2000), for the ratification of the CTBT by all the named states, and for negotiations leading to an FMCT. But we note that each of these treaties and potential treaties is only a partial step in the direction of nuclear weapons abolition. We would therefore urge that government acknowledge the eventual need for an over-arching treaty or convention that would ban the possession, use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in the same way that the Chemical Weapons and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Conventions ban those WMD. Such a treaty would represent the logical culmination of all the relevant partial treaties such as the NPT and not conflict with it.

2. The UK's commendable support for a cluster weapons ban shows that we can promote measures of disarmament involving weapons otherwise seen as of substantial value by the military. The moral arguments against cluster bombs are equally cogent when applied to nuclear weapons (NW). Banning the latter would therefore seem to be a logical further step in the progress towards a world in conformity with both morality and the relevant Geneva Conventions on the conduct of war.

3. Securing the non-proliferation of NW is essential to preserve a safe world. But nuclear non-proliferation is inevitably linked with nuclear disarmament. The contrast between the '50 more years' of UK NW anticipated both by Cm. 7291 and by the governmental white paper last year on the question of Trident renewal, and the official support for disarmament initiatives, is a stark one. H.M. Government must acknowledge the need to put UK NW on a disarmament negotiating table. The decision to continue in possession of the U.K.'s nuclear weapons must be seen as tentative, potentially reversible, and certainly dependent upon progress with disarmament involving all the nuclear weapons states, both those acknowledged by the NPT and others.

4. NATO is primarily a military alliance. Although it has a modest political dimension, as illustrated by the Partnership for Peace, it is clearly distinct in style and governance from a moderately democratic alliance such as the European Union. The role of NATO in the post cold war world and its involvement in 'out of area' actions such as that in Afghanistan needs to be carefully examined and if necessary deconstructed. All such alliances have problems which need to be addressed; indefinite extension of NATO membership, even involving democratic states, is not a necessary 'good'. NATO's nuclear doctrine, including its continued acceptance and sometime advocacy of a possible 'first strike' role for nuclear weapons, is a cold war legacy which requires discussion and revision. The political role of NATO needs to be emphasized over the military role. Its military role, if actively used at all, must be consistent with the U.N. charter and conducted with continuous oversight by the Security Council.

5. We wish to emphasize the need to find non-military solutions to security problems, including especially the problems of terrorism. The government must acknowledge the different security problems represented by the existence of different militant groups and the different forms taken by such groups – as in the modest Cm. 7291 statement distinguishing Hamas and Hizbullah from other groups creating security concerns..

6. We point out that deterrence theory, both nuclear and non-nuclear, is intrinsically problematic. But in particular deterrence of any kind is unlikely to work against non-state actors, and nuclear deterrence cannot be effective against such groups; its use only encourages small states to think of NW as an insurance option and hence weakens the effectiveness of the NPT.
7. Any discussion of security needs must acknowledge the political and economic roots of conflict. It is arguable that some UK policies may exacerbate or have exacerbated such conflict roots rather than ameliorated them and that government has been slow to acknowledge the possibility of policy mistakes.
8. We wish to point out the possibility of various disarmament actions that fall short of complete nuclear disarmament but which can represent gradual steps toward a world without nuclear weapons. These include: decreasing the numbers of NW; dealerting; abandoning continuous NW patrols; separating missiles and warheads; formally abandoning the 'first use' option (both for NATO and UK); and transparency re the location and existence of NW in the UK (thus we should acknowledge the removal of US NW from Lakenheath). The UK should also support all treaty structures that limit any role for NW, including the recognition of all the currently agreed Nuclear Weapons Free Zones and agreeing formally to provide negative security assurances (NSAs) both by the UK individually and by NATO as an alliance currently depending on nuclear weapons. It should press for similar actions by the other NWS. The success of the 2010 review conference of the NPT will depend upon such unilateral or multilateral actions as well as upon progress within the Conference on Disarmament in negotiations for an FMCT and for PAROS.
9. We believe that it should be but perhaps is not unnecessary to point out that a 'rules based' world means that no actions prohibited by the UN charter or not specifically authorised by the Security Council should be undertaken. It is hard to see how any use or threat of use of NW would be consistent with the charter or ever authorized by the Security Council. Continued possession of NW, and all that implies, may thus be inherently inconsistent with the establishment of a 'rules based' world.
10. The security of the UK, and of other states, is thus linked with the need for progress in nuclear disarmament. Failure to secure concrete proposals either within the CD beforehand or at the 2010 NPT Review Conference itself will mean a reversion to a less secure world.

Peter Nicholls, Chair Abolition 2000 UK. 29/September/2008.

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